SUKKOT, SHEMINI ATZERET AND SIMCHAT TORAH

Insights into happiness from Rabbi Doron Perez, Rabbi Chaim Navon, Mrs. Shira Smiles, Rabbi Hershel Schachter, Rabbi Dr. Aaron Adler, Rabbi David Aaron and Rabbi Alex Israel

DEDICATED IN LOVING MEMORY OF
PINCHAS KURNEDZ
BY HIS CHILDREN AND FAMILY
A SURVIVOR, A FIGHTER, AND A PASSIONATE
ZIONIST LOVED AND MISSED BY ALL
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My grandparents were married for 75 years. They passed away over the last two years, both at the age of 97. At their 75th wedding anniversary, I thought to myself that I had never met or known of another couple who had reached this remarkable milestone.

Originally from Lithuania and later South Africa, my grandparents made Aliyah in 1979 to Tel Aviv. They left all their children and grandchildren behind in the hope that they would follow. They were leaders of the Jewish community and great Zionists and believed that this was the right thing to do. Indeed, they were privileged that all their children and grandchildren followed suit and all live in Israel today.

My grandparents always seemed to have a loving and happy marriage. So, when I first got married, I decided to ask my grandmother a question about happiness in marriage. I was totally unprepared for the answer that I received. When I asked her whether her 55 years of marriage at that time had been happy ones, she responded as follows: “You know, I have never really thought about it.”

I could not believe that a person who had been married for 55 years had never thought about whether or not their marriage had been a happy one. It made me realize how different our generation is as we seem to be obsessed with the pursuit of happiness and are continually questioning whether we are happy about all aspects of our lives. Herein lies a remarkable irony: the generation that relentlessly pursues happiness seems to be the most distant from it.

This is the central theme in cultural critic Ruth Whippman’s book, *America The Anxious – How Our Pursuit of Happiness is Creating a Nation of Nervous Wrecks.* She quotes a study of psychologists from the University of California, Berkeley who show that “paradoxically, the more people valued and were encouraged to value happiness as a separate life goal, the less happy they were.”

The American writer and thinker Henry David Thoreau put it well when he said “Happiness is like a butterfly. The more you chase it, the more it eludes you. But if you turn your attention to other things, it comes and sits softly on your shoulder.”

Why is this the case? Why is the quest for happiness the very sign that we won’t find it? The answer is that happiness is not something we find when we search for it but a by-product of living life in the correct way. What emerges clearly is that happiness is not a transient emotion or a destination to be pursued but rather a *state of being.*

It is this very state of being, says Rav Shimon Raphael Hirsch, that we ultimately hope to be blessed with on Sukkot. After all, only this holiday is defined in our prayers as זְמַן שִׂמְחָתֵנוּ – the time of our happiness. Additionally, it is the only holiday where we find the unusual expression of *simcha* וְהָיִיתָ אַךְ שָׂמֵֽחַ “You should be only happy,” implying a type of complete or ultimate happiness. What is the meaning of this phrase? Rav Hirsch explains that it refers to a state of being, a mindset that we hope to achieve having been celebrating in G-d’s presence in the Temple precinct for the entire seven days.

Happiness can be transformed into a character trait, a permanent quality and a *joie de vivre* that accompanies us throughout our lives. It is this state of being that we hope to take with us into the long, rainy winter months. Indeed it can only be this mindset that will successfully see us through the ‘winter periods’ of life, the difficult and dark times.

The Malbim states that this is the very meaning of the word שִׂמְחָה in...
Tanach, as opposed to אֲשֶׁר. These are the two primary expressions of joy in the Bible and they have distinct meanings. אֲשֶׁר is an expression of external celebratory joy whereas שִׂמְחָה is a more internal and ongoing sense of joy – a state of being.

Perhaps this is the reason why Israel is continually rated among the happiest countries in the world. At least according to the UN World Happiness Report conducted annually over the last eight years. The report ranks 156 countries by how happy their citizens perceive themselves to be, according to six key variables: GDP per capita, social support, life expectancy, freedom to make choices, freedom from corruption and generosity. Year in and year out, Israel is in the top 10 to 15 countries, scoring ahead of countries such as the UK, Germany, Luxembourg, the US and over 140 other countries.

What is striking about these findings is that Israel ranks ahead of dozens of countries who don’t face the ongoing challenges of aggressive Terror States on their borders (Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon), a threat of nuclear extinction (Iran’s publicly stated aspirations and nuclear program), ongoing Palestinian terror attacks and therefore the need for mandatory military draft. Incredibly, despite these unique threats and being situated in one of the toughest regions in the world, Israel scores high every time.

How can this be explained?

It seems to me that living in Israel, despite all the challenges, comes with a great sense of being Jewish. Israel is the only country that G-d promised to the Jewish people and no other nation has so long and deep a connection to a land like the Jewish people’s connection to Eretz Yisrael. It is somehow linked to the essence of Jewish life, to our ultimate purpose. Journeying to the Land like Abraham, walking the same streets as Samuel and fighting like King David to defend the same country gives those living in Israel a unique sense of connection to Jewish history and destiny. An indescribable feeling of being Jewish.

This also explains an unusual detail of Halacha. Why is the Priestly Blessing (duchening) performed every day in Israel, but only on Yamim Tovim in the Diaspora? The Rema explains that a Kohen must be in a state of simcha to bless the people. Since this can be achieved only on the holidays, as they are designated times of celebration, only then can the Kohanim perform the blessing.

I always struggled to understand this as in Israel Kohanim perform this every day. Are people happier in Israel? There are many unhappy people in Israel and many very happy people around the world, and vice-versa!

It seems that the answer is as explained above. The happiness being discussed here is not the individual measure of this or that person, but rather a deep and collective state of being. There is something about being in Israel, a spiritual synchronicity, a type of X-Factor plugging one into a deep state of alignment with Jewish destiny and hence a state of happiness.

Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are unique opportunities to tap into this sense of simcha. To celebrate Jewish life, the mitzvot of the day and to stand in the presence of G-d. When we are living in sync with our deepest values, we merit the resultant blessing of living with happiness as a state of being. We hope and pray that it accompanies us throughout our lives. The butterfly will then sit constantly on our shoulder.

1 St. Martin’s Press 2016.
2 Rav Hirsch’s commentary on Deuteronomy 16:15.
3 Of the three times in Torah that simcha (joy) is mentioned in connection with a holiday, two are about Sukkot.
4 The simple meaning of the verse refers to Sukkot. Rashi quotes the Talmudic commentary in Sukkot 48a which connects it to the last day of chag – Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah. This day (days in the Diaspora), when there are no particular mitzvot such as sitting in the sukkah or waving the lulav, seem to be the crescendo and pinnacle of our happiness. We simply celebrate being in G-d’s presence alone and are most primed to achieve this level of ultimate happiness.
5 Rabbi Meir Leibush. He mentions this distinction in a number of places, for example, see Isaiah 35, 1, in his section on the meaning of words.
6 Orach Chaim 128:44.

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I used to get frustrated each year when, on the last few days of Sukkot, I noticed how quickly the arava leaves lost their vitality, shriveled up and died. In my attempts to keep them fresh like the beautiful hadas branches, I kept them rolled up in a wet towel in the fridge, standing in a bucket of fresh water, even tucked away inside the freezer – but to no avail. Nothing seemed to really work. Recently, however, I have changed the way I look at those pale-green dried leaves. Here’s why.

At first glance, the arava is indeed the least impressive of the Four Species. According to our Sages, the arava is the least worthy when compared to the etrog, lulav and hadas. It has some value only if bound together with the other species, which are of higher importance and can therefore atone for it. How surprising it is, therefore, to find two Sukkot practices focusing on the arava alone: (a) the Murbiyot, the long arava branches – 5.5 meters tall – picked by a river outside Jerusalem and erected at the four corners of the altar in the courtyard of the Temple throughout the seven days of Sukkot, with their ends bent onto the top of the altar (Mishnah Sukkah 4:5), and (b) the Chavata, the five aravot we tie together and beat on the floor in shul at the end of the Hoshanot on Hoshanah Rabbah, a custom originated by the early Prophets (Rambam, Lulav 7:24).

So here is a fresh look at the arava: Sukkot is known as the “Judgement Day for Rain” (Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:2), and the arava, whose leaves are the fastest to dry once removed from a water source, is the most fitting tree through which to show our absolute dependence on rain, our primordial fear of famine and our inherent thirst for water – all of which are strongly felt in a desert land like Israel.

The Murbiyot branches of the arava, which naturally grow on the riverbanks and need lots of water to survive [the one growing in my own back yard consumes three times as much water as the rest of my fruit trees], are placed at the corners of the altar, not far from the large fire burning on top of it. Within a matter of minutes the fresh, beautifully-shaped leaves darken, twist and dry, hanging there lifeless and miserable in front of the massive celebrating crowds. Apart from being a catalyst for the upcoming Prayer for Rain recited on the last day of Sukkot, this sight serves as a symbolic reminder of our complete dependence on G-d, and of our thirst for Torah.

The same applies to the Chavata, the beating of the arava on the floor. When seeing how easily even the fresh leaves fall off the arava branches, we are reminded of our eternal state of mortal helplessness. I personally try to apply this idea to various aspects of Jewish practice, which include humbling experiences such as dipping in a mikveh or the horrible weakness I feel at the end of fast days.

The need for such visual effects and physical actions to reinforce and impress spiritual messages into our psyche is obvious. But it makes even more sense if we remember that there are six long months after Sukkot until all Jewish pilgrims gather again at the Temple in Jerusalem to celebrate Pesach together. Since Sukkot is followed by the year’s longest break between holidays, it is imperative to raise awareness of our need for G-d’s loving, caring, protecting and providing hand in our daily lives while we are far from the Place He chose. The arava was selected, due to its evident weakness, as the medium through which to convey this important value in Jewish life. In that sense, I’m happy to see my aravot begin to dry.

I once saw a rationalist bumper sticker that read “Prayer is for Wimps.” True enough. Prayer can be such a powerful tool and connect us to G-d only after we admit our own powerlessness and stand before Him with a genuine feeling of constant need. This is what we learn from the arava. Indeed, the secret of Tefilla rests in the awe-inspiring knowledge that we are absolutely dependent on G-d, every minute of every day.

This is powerful. For truly attaching ourselves to the Absolute Power rests on our understanding that we are absolutely powerless without Him.

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E very motzei Yom Kippur, a bat kol (heavenly voice) announces, “Go eat your bread with joy... for the L-rd has already accepted your deeds” (Kohelet 9:7).

Chazal explain that this bat kol comes to inform us that G-d has forgiven all of our previously-committed aveirot (sins) and that a new accounting begins from this point. From this we see that the Yemei HaDin (Days of Judgment) end on motza’ei Yom Kippur.

On the other hand, we know that the Days of Judgment end on Hoshanah Rabbah, a day on which the Days of Judgment end on Yom Kippur. In reality, they end on motza’ei Yom Kippur. This end, however, is only in the sense of geula. The geula of motza’ei Yom Kippur is reinforced by Sukkot and Yemei HaDin. In reality, they end on Hoshanah Rabbah, when we spend more time in tefilla requesting the shemira of our positive judgment.

With our new understanding of the relationship between geula and shemira, we can now resolve the apparent contradiction above regarding the conclusion of the Yemei HaDin. In reality, they end on motza’ei Yom Kippur. This end, however, is only in the sense of geula. The geula of motza’ei Yom Kippur is reinforced by Sukkot and Hoshanah Rabbah, when we spend more time in tefilla requesting the shemira of our positive judgment.

Yehoshua bin Nun’s conquest of Eretz Yisrael was a tremendous geula. However, he did not ask G-d for shemira of this geula. When Ezra returned to Eretz Yisrael after 70 years of galut, he requested shemira of this geula through a nullification of the yetzer hara of avodah zara, which protected the Bnei HaGolah like a sukkah.

This principle must accompany us our entire lives: every time we merit geula or Divine assistance we must pray for shemira and endeavor to keep the geula intact for as long as possible. This way we will continue to increase kavod Shamayim (G-d’s honor) through all of our actions.

Inasmuch as we connect our lives to Torah as the center and the guide for all our actions, through learning, through Shabbat and the chagim, we guarantee that all the growth and progress we have made so far will not go to waste. Not only will we be able to protect our growth, but we will even be able to reinforce it and be mekadesh sham Shamayim (sanctify the Name of Heaven) in all of our actions.

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The Connection Between Yom Kippur and Sukkot

Ya’akov and Eisav go their separate ways. The Torah tells us that Ya’akov built sukkot for his livestock and that he subsequently named that area Sukkot. Later, the Torah mentions sukkot again, telling us that Bnei Yisrael made camp in Sukkot after leaving Rameses. Why is it so important today that we know of Ya’akov’s – and later Bnei Yisrael’s – encampment in Sukkot?

The Gemara (Berachot 4b) teaches that we must juxtapose geula (redemption) and tefillah (the Amidah prayer). The Gemara challenges this ruling: in Ma’ariv we say Hashkiveinu between the bracha of ga’al Yisrael and the Amidah, thus interrupting between geula and tefilla. The answer is that it is not an interruption. Hashkiveinu is considered a geula arichta, an extension of our reference to geula. What we are to understand from this is that every geula, personal or communal, is destined to collapse if the beneficiaries don’t request protection (shemira) for that geula. Hashkiveinu is a geula arichta – the protection of Shomer amo Yisrael (the Guardian of His people Israel) is essential for the preservation of the geula of ga’al Yisrael.

This protection is represented by the sukkah – a fragile structure made of cheap, flimsy wood, without a door, without a lock, without an alarm system. The sukkah makes a statement: we don’t need any external protection. G-d’s protection is more than enough. Indeed, in the bracha of Hashkiveinu itself we refer to the protection represented by the sukkah: “Ufros aleinu sukkat shlomecha – spread over us the sukkah of Your peace.”

In order to understand, we must ask a third question: the first time we find a sukkah in the Torah is after Ya’akov and Eisav go their separate ways. The Torah tells us that Ya’akov built sukkot for his livestock and that he subsequently named that area Sukkot. Later, the Torah mentions sukkot again, telling us that Bnei Yisrael made camp in Sukkot after leaving Rameses. Why is it so important today that we know of Ya’akov’s – and later Bnei Yisrael’s – encampment in Sukkot?

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Hakafot are a central feature of Sukkot and the one practice common to both Sukkot and Simchat Torah.

**SUKKOT – TORAH IN THE MIDDLE**

Our hakafot commemorate those performed around the altar in the Beit Mikdash. Lacking sacrifices today, we enhance the bima during the Sukkot hakafot by adding a Sefer Torah and focusing on the centrality of the Torah to Jewish life.

On Simchat Torah, the Torah becomes part of the actual hakafot. This begs the question: with the Torah no longer in the center of the circle, what or who is?

**CELEBRATING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH G-D**

According to the Gemara (Taanit 31a), in the future G-d will arrange a circle of tzaddikim in Gan Eden who dance and point to Him in the middle. Hence one can view our Simchat Torah hakafot as both the climax of our Sukkot/Simchat Torah celebration and as a precursor to a celebration of our lives completely revolving around G-d.

The yehi ratzon we say before hakafot also expresses this notion by asking G-d to allow the hakafot to break down the iron wall that exists between us and Him and to help us connect with Him and His Torah.

This notion is reinforced by one of the verses: “Behold! This is our G-d; we hoped for Him that He would save us” (Isaiah 25:9). This is the precise verse the tzaddikim will recite when pointing to G-d at the center of the circle.

After circling the Torah during Sukkot, we carry it on Simchat Torah and celebrate the relationship it facilitates with G-d.

**THE CHILDREN – OUR FUTURE**

Alternatively, the hakafot are meant to shift the focus to our children. The Rashba mentions a custom to adorn children with the silver crowns (like those atop Sifrei Torah) and walk them to the Aron Kodesh.

Linking the Torah to our children celebrates having children we can teach Torah to and aims to ensure that it is passed on to future generations.

By dancing with and around our children we pray that they too will live by and pass the Torah on to their children, as we say in the Birka HaTorah every morning: “And may we and our descendants and the descendants of Your people the House of Israel, all know Your Name and study Your Torah for its own sake.”

The Torah reading on Simchat Torah includes the pasuk מְדִינָה שָׂפָה לְמִשְׁכַּב מַרְכֵּז (Deuteronomy 33:4), the first verse we teach children as soon as they come of age, which emphasizes that the Torah is our eternal communal inheritance, and perpetually transmitted from generation to generation.

Throughout our turbulent history, it was always our focus on our children and raising them on Torah values that ensured our continued survival.

A beautiful story, immortalized by a popular song, powerfully expresses this idea:

*I remember liberation, joy and fear both intertwined. Where to go and what to do, and how to leave the pain behind. My heart said “Go to Vilna,” dare I pray yet once again. For the chance to find a loved one, or perhaps a childhood friend. It took many months to get there, from the late spring to the fall. And as I, many others, close to four hundred in all. And slowly there was healing, broken souls now mixed with light. When someone proudly cried out, “Simchat Torah is tonight!” We ran as one toward the shul, our spirits in a trance. We tore apart the barricade – in defiance, we would dance. But the scene before our eyes shook us to the core. Scraps of siddur, bullet holes, and bloodstains on the floor. Turning to the eastern wall, we looked on in despair. There would be no scrolls to dance with – the Holy Ark was bare. Then we heard two children crying, a boy and girl whom no-one knew. We realized that no children were among us but those two. We danced round and round in circles as if the world had done no wrong. From evening until morning filling up the shul with song. Though we had no Sifrei Torah to clutch and hold up high, in their place we held those children, Am Yisrael Chai! The Jewish people would live on!*

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1. Based on Ezekiel 4:3 and Berachot 32b.
2. See Yeushalmi (Sukkah 19a), which connects the hakafot around the altar to those around Jericho.
3. See Shir HaShirim 4:1, which connects the celebration of G-d’s salvation to a celebration of our relationship with G-d Himself.
4. Responsa (Meyuchasot leRamban) 260.
5. Sukkah 42a.
6. Ramban on this verse says that the Torah will never be forgotten by the children of the Jewish people.
7. The Man From Vilna, Journeys IV (Abie Rotenberg).

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I
n Masechet Ta’anit Rabbi Eliezer maintains that we should begin acknowledging the Divine power over rain from the moment we take the lulav (i.e. first day of Sukkot), for just as the Four Species are brought to appease G-d for water, so are we reminded that the world cannot exist without water.1

Similarly, we are taught in Masechet Rosh Hashanah that we are all judged for water on Sukkot and are therefore obligated to pour water libations over the altar in order to be blessed with rain.

The Tosefta explains that this universal need for rain at the time of Sukkot is based on Zechariah’s prophecy in the haftarah on the first day of Sukkot: “...everyone that is left of all the nations that came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the L-rd of Hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles... the families of the earth go not up unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the L-rd of Hosts, upon them there shall be no rain.”

Sukkot is a time when we recognize a universal need for rain and we pray together with the other nations recognizing our G-d as the G-d of Nature.

We bring 70 bulls on behalf of the other nations throughout the seven days of Sukkot, and we sacrifice with water – a symbol of universalism.

On Pesach and Shavuot, though we celebrate universal agricultural seasons, we focus on our particular relationship with G-d who took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, gave us the Torah, and brought us to the Land of Israel.

We therefore celebrate and commemorate with wine, which is indicative of a more personal relationship.2

This may be underscored through the transition in Bereishit from the stories of the waters of Eden to the waters of the flood of Noach’s generation. Throughout the first 10 generations of mankind, there is a consistent universal selection of all mankind to recognize G-d and call out in His name.3

After the flood, G-d promises that He will never again universally destroy or restart the world. The first postdiluvian story tells of Noach who planted a vineyard, symbolic of a more personal relationship with Man and concludes with the blessing of one son in particular – Shem. From then on, only the toladot (offspring) of Shem (e.g. Avraham-Yitzchak-Ya’akov) will be selected to call out consistently in G-d’s name, follow His commandments and merit inheritance of the Land of Israel.

When Shlomo HaMelech inaugurates the First Temple, he proclaims that the Beit HaMikdash will not only serve the particular needs for Bnei Yisrael to pray for rain and salvation from enemies but as a place for all peoples of all nations to pay homage to G-d.4

He chooses the month of Tishrei and the holiday of Sukkot for the Temple’s inauguration, a time of universal agricultural bounty and anxiety for rain.

Rabbi Elazar said: These 70 bulls sacrificed as additional offerings over the course of the seven days of Sukkot, to what do they correspond? They correspond to the 70 nations of the world and are brought to atone for their sins and to hasten world peace. Why is a single bull sacrificed on the Eighth Day of Assembly? It corresponds to the singular nation, Israel.

The Gemara cites a parable about a king who said to his servants: prepare me a great feast that will last for several days. When the feast concluded, on the last day, he said to his beloved servant: prepare me a small feast so I can derive pleasure from you alone.5

On Shemini Atzeret we leave our sukot and Arba’a Minim. We continue to celebrate and pray for rain, but alone. We re-focus on our particular relationship with G-d as manifest through the one bull offering and the end of the water libations. We return to feasting exclusively with wine as we beseech G-d for water. In place of circling the altar/bima for seven days with universal agricultural species, we dance seven circles with Sifrei Torah and re-transition to a happiness only experienced between us and G-d.

Specifically on Sukkot we have an opportunity to recognize a dual simcha – of universalism and particularism, of water and wine. We have an opportunity to sing a song of humanity and the song of the Jewish nation6

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1 As each one of the Four Species represents a different source of water in Eretz Yisrael: etrog – irrigation, lulav – desert springs, hadas - rainwater, arava - river water.
2 See abundant imagery in Shir HaShirim.
3 Indicative through the motif of “toladot.”
4 I Kings 8:41-42.
5 Sukkah 55b.
6 See Rav Kook,Orot HaKodesh II, p. 444.

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A Beautiful Etrog
or a New Dress?

Throughout the Torah there is a din of hidur mitzvah, beautifying the mitzvah.
Don’t just perform the mitzvah by rote. Make the effort to make your sukkah beautiful, your lulav beautiful, your shofar, candlesticks, Sefer Torah, etc.

However, there is a special hidur with regards to Sukkot. According to Rashi (Sukkah 29b), a dry lulav is invalid for use on Sukkot because it is not mehudar. Tosfot (ibid.) disagrees and gives another explanation: there is a special instruction to acquire a beautiful set of the Four Species. Beautification does not usually impair the performance of a mitzvah but here it does. And indeed, unlike any other mitzvah, the widespread custom is to search out a particularly beautiful set of Arba’a Minim (four species). Why?

Firstly, the Torah tells us to take a רביעי עץ פורים. Chazal teach us that this means an etrog. The Meiri thinks that the obligation to beautify the mitzvah is solely referring to the etrog. We cannot deduce an obligation to beautify other mitzvot because the word זмагазин is not an adjective but a noun, although many Rishonim say that we can also learn זマンション from it. Take the Ramban for example, who says that the etrog is the most beautiful fruit, and so we need to take the most beautiful and “pleasing to look at” of each of the species.

It is possible that the need for hidur is connected not just to the Arba’a Minim but to the entire chag of Sukkot. This is based on the idea that the more economic abundance we enjoy, the more we need to beautify our mitzvot.

The harvest holiday, another name for Sukkot, expresses economic abundance. The Torah even stresses the joy of the chag as a result of this abundance, from bringing your harvest into your house (Deuteronomy 16:13-14). On the other hand, too much economic comfort can lead to us forgetting G-d. Chazal tell us that a person only rebels as a result of satiation.

Therefore, the obligation of hidur is most pressing on Sukkot, when, after the harvest, our economic wealth is all the more prominent. And just as we beautify other mitzvot, this too transforms our physical wealth into part of our Avodat Hashem, our spiritual wealth.

CAN WE PRAY FOR MONEY?

Is it fitting to pray for money? And especially someone who has money and doesn’t need any more to fulfil his basic needs? Rabbi Nachman of Breslov says that praying for one’s personal and seemingly mundane needs is a great thing.

And even if we can attain the thing we are praying for without prayer, i.e. money, food, success in a test, etc., we should still pray for it. Because without prayer, the attainment or the achievement is disconnected from G-d. With prayer it rises a level and becomes connected to something bigger than us. We link the physical with the spiritual and transform our physical belongings to a much higher and admirable plane.

BEAUTIFYING THE MITZVOT
BETWEEN EACH OTHER

After having learned the obligation to beautify the mitzvot from the verse ארבעה עץ פורים – This is my G-d and I shall beautify Him, the Gemara (Shabbat 133b) adds an important point: “Abba Shaul says, etrog – be like Him. Just as He is compassionate and merciful, so should you be compassionate and merciful.”

Hidur is not just about spending more money on a nicer pair of tefillin or a bigger Chanukiah. It’s also about beautifying the mitzvot between us and our fellow human beings, for through them we become G-d-like. This means offering a good word wherever we can, always smiling at people, being respectful of other opinions, listening intently and sincerely to what others have to say, and so on.

A man once came to Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and said: “Rabbi, this is the etrog I bought this year.”

“How much did you pay for it?” asked the Rav.

“How much? $100.”

The Rav knew that the man couldn’t afford such a price and that he could have bought a very good etrog for $20. He asked him: “And did you buy your wife a new dress for Sukkot?”

“No,” said the man.

“Hidur mitzvah is very admirable, but observing אשה בתוספת הג込まれ by buying your wife a new dress is much more important!”

Beautifying the mitzvot means beautifying all aspects of our lives, inside our homes and outside, because it indicates our love for His mitzvot, which will then deepen our connection with and bring us closer to Him.

1 Shabbat 133.
2 Sifri Devarim, Eikev, 43.
3 Sichot HaRan, 233.

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“But on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate G-d’s holiday for seven days... take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a citron tree... and rejoice before the L-rd your G-d for seven days...” (Leviticus 23:39-41).

“You shall make the holiday of Sukkot for seven days, when you gather in from your threshing floor and your winery. And you shall rejoice on your holiday... for G-d will have blessed you through all of your crops and your actions and you will be utterly happy...” (Deuteronomy 16:13-15).

Sukkot has agricultural significance. It is the harvest festival. This is the time when farmers gather in the fruit and other produce now ready for harvesting, and bring it inside, before the rainy season. Sitting in the sukkah can therefore be interpreted as a connection to this agricultural work. By dwelling out in the field, the farmers can save time in getting there, protect their produce from thieves or animals and supervise the work. And we do find echoes of this role of the sukkah in Isaiah 1:8: “The daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a shed in a gourd field...”

Yet there is also another reason for sitting in the sukkah: “… so that your generations will know that I caused the Children of Israel to live in booths when I took them out of the land of Egypt…” (Leviticus 23:42-43).

So Sukkot is not just the harvest holiday, but also a commemoration of Bnei Yisrael’s living conditions in the desert. Some commentators say they were actual sukkot (Rashbam, Ibn Ezra for example), in which case we have the obligation to remember what we lacked and express gratitude to G-d rather than extolling our own virtues. Others say that the sukkot we must remember are the Clouds of Glory that accompanied Bnei Yisrael in the desert (Rashi and Ramban), i.e. the emphasis is on remembering the Divine protection we enjoyed at the time.

Whichever way we interpret it, the meaning of Sukkot – according to these verses – is to remember the lack we experienced in the desert and the fact that G-d provided all of our needs. When a person is in a state of lack, the feeling of dependence on G-d increases, and he realizes that his entire life is in G-d’s hands. Sukkot therefore reminds us of our temporary existence in this world, our reliance on G-d and the obligation to put our trust in Him.

This means that Sukkot contains two opposites: חַג הָאָסִיף – the harvest festival, which expresses fullness, abundance, and gratitude to G-d for the goodness He showers upon us. And חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת, which exemplifies impermanence, following G-d “in an unsowed land,” dependence, and trust in G-d to provide what we need even in crisis.

These two sides of the holiday are also two sides in our lives: abundance and lack; gratitude and faith. And they are both present at almost every stage of life, though it may be difficult for us to discern one or the other. We are often full of abundance and self-confidence to the extent that we are certain that nothing can shake us. And sometimes we feel the heaviness of lack, of crisis, and our complete and utter dependence on G-d.

Sukkot teaches us to feel both simultaneously. When times are good, to remember that good is not absolute and is not dependent on us but on G-d’s Will. And during the bad times, to know that we still have much to be grateful for.

In our modern world we surround ourselves with all sorts of securities – family, house, a job, community, friends, insurance, and more. Are we ready to leave this comfort zone, detach ourselves from this sense of security and go out into the sukkah to live under the canopy of Heaven? Are we really able to feel that “Even in the valley of death I will fear no evil because You are with me” (Psalms 23:4)?

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The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 30:11) tells us that the four species we shake on Sukkot are parallel to four different parts of our body. The lulav is the spine, the etrog is the heart, the hadassim are our eyes and the aravot are our lips. The question is that three out of four represent a perfect parallel. One etrog and one lulav parallel one heart and one spine. Two aravot match two lips. What is perplexing though is three hadassim and only two eyes! What is the deeper idea here?

Rav Dov Weinberger (Shemen HaTov Vol. 2) suggests that each of us must always have triple-time awareness. We live in the present, but with an eye on where we are going while basing it on where we have come from. Akavya ben Mahalalel tells us דַּע מֵאַיִן בָּאתָ, "know from where you have come," וּלְאָן אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ, "and to where you are presently going," אַחֲרֵיהֶם וְלָמָּה, "and before Whom you will stand in judgment at the end of days." Past, present, and future. The three eyes of every Jew.

Rav Hutner adds that maybe this is the deeper idea behind Chazal's teaching that only three people are called forefathers (Berachot 16b). The three forefathers represent our three outlooks. Avraham, spending his life spreading monotheism and knowledge of G-d, represents the present. Yitzchak, the first born Jew, with his Brit Milah on the eighth day – a perfect beginning, represents the past. And Yaakov died מִטָּתוֹ שֶׁלִּשְׁלֹמֹה, the first father with all his children righteous, representing the future. Thus, to fully capitalize on all of our tremendous potential, we need to constantly remember the symbolism of our three hadassim.

One additional and crucial element. Rav Zevin notes that every single item in the universe has some type of lifespan. People, animals, trees – even inanimate objects – all exist for a certain amount of time. It could be 10 years, 120 years or even 10,000 years. But each has a time limit to its existence. Except for one thing, which has no time – time itself! Before we realize it, each moment in the present becomes the past. It’s gone, never to return. And yet ironically, the only thing we can actually eternalize for eternity is time itself! If we fill our present, our days with Torah and mitzvot, then those days come with us forever. As it says, וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בַּיָּמִים, "Avraham came with all his days."

So yes, we always have our eye towards the future, building on our past. Yet what will transport us to eternity is capitalizing on the present.

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Rav Soloveitchik suggested that we can derive a halachic definition of simcha from a discussion in the Gemara, which questions how a metzora must conduct himself on Yom Tov with regard to the restrictions imposed upon him by his tzara’at.

Is he forbidden to enter the Israelite encampment, cut his hair, launder his clothes, and greet other people over the course of Yom Tov? Or are the restrictions placed upon the metzora superseded by the mitzvah of simcha that exists on Yom Tov?

The Gemara derives from a seemingly superfluous word, וְאֱלֹקֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים, “And the person with tzara’at,” that even a Kohen Gadol is included in the restrictions of tzara’at.

The Gemara then presents an analogy: “The Kohen Gadol’s status during the entire year corresponds to the status of all other people on Yom Tov [with regard to mourning].” Therefore, a metzora must conduct himself on Yom Tov according to the restrictions imposed upon him by his tzara’at, just as a Kohen Gadol with tzara’at must act in accordance with those restrictions all year round.

The Rav analyzed the Gemara’s analogy in light of how the Rambam describes the Kohen Gadol’s essential function. The Rambam writes, “It is the glory and honor [of the Kohen Gadol] to remain in the Mikdash all day.”

Thus, the Kohen Gadol’s role is to serve as a constant presence in the Beit HaMikdash, overseeing the avodah. Since, according to the Gemara, every Jew on Yom Tov is compared to the Kohen Gadol, we see that the definition of simcha on Yom Tov is the state of being in the presence of G-d.

This state, enjoyed by the Kohen Gadol the entire year and by all other people on Yom Tov, is described in the pasuk, והַצָּרוּעַ וְהַאֱלֹקֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים, “And you shall rejoice before Hashem, your G-d, for a seven-day period [on Sukkot].” Indeed, whenever the Torah speaks of simcha, it connects this emotion with one’s appearing before G-d. On the Shalosh Regalim, when one is ohol regel, he finds himself lifnai Hashem.

The Rav distinguishes between the Beit HaMikdash and a Beit HaKnesset to help illustrate the difference between Shabbat and Yom Tov. A Beit HaKnesset is our house, to which G-d comes to visit. In contrast, the Beit HaMikdash is termed Beit Hashem, where we come to visit with Him. In both locations, Man has a ‘rendezvous’ with G-d; the difference between the two locations is whether Man is the visitor or the one being visited.

A similar distinction separates Shabbat from Yom Tov. The Shulchan Aruch rules that while one may not wear weekday clothing on either Shabbat or Yom Tov, clothing of Yom Tov should be superior to Shabbat clothing. The Rav explained that this is because there is an obligation of simcha on Yom Tov, as we appear lifnai Hashem in the Beit HaMikdash to fulfill the mitzvah of aliyyah laRegel. On Yom Tov, the Jew enters into the domain of G-d, Who welcomes him into His home. When visiting the King in His royal palace, a most splendid manner of dress is mandated.

The contrast between Shabbat and Yom Tov is most apparent when each of these days comes into conflict with the concept of aveilut (mourning). On Shabbat, unlike on Yom Tov, aveilut is observed privately; Shabbat is included in the seven days of shiva. Similarly, Shabbat does not cancel shiva or shloshim the way Yom Tov does. Tosfot teaches that it is the element of simcha on Yom Tov that cancels aveilut, and this mitzvah is absent on Shabbat.

The Gemara in Chzagigah teaches, וְאֵין עַצְבּוּת לִפְנֵי הקב”ה, “There is no sadness in the presence of the Holy One, Blessed be He.”

The Gemara’s source is the pasuk, והַצָּרוּעַ וְהַאֱלֹקֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים, “Glory and majesty are before Him; might and delight are in His place.” There is always happiness and rejoicing before G-d, and so there can be no aveilut on Yom Tov. Simcha and aveilut are mutually exclusive, since being lifnai Hashem, in His house, is a contradiction to a state of aveilut.

On Shabbat, Man does not stand lifnai Hashem. For the duration of Shabbat, G-d dwells with Man in his abode; He joins him in his pain.

May we merit to stand with simcha before G-d in the Beit HaMikdash, speedily and in our days.

1 Mo’ed Kattan 14b.
2 Vayikra 13:45.
3 Hilchot Klei HaMikdash 5:7.
4 Vayikra 23:40.
6 Orach Chaim 529:1.
7 Divrei HaYamim I 16:27.

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Rabbi Hershel Schachter
Living here in Israel allows one to gain a deeper appreciation of the holidays of the Jewish calendar. In their deepest sense, they were all meant to be observed here in Israel. Perhaps that is what our rabbis intended when they cryptically said that the observance of the *mitzvot* that the Jewish people have fulfilled and continue to practice in the Diaspora is really a training exercise for their true adherence when they return to the Land of Israel.

This observation is certainly true regarding the Jewish holidays and particularly regarding Sukkot. Perhaps no other holiday so symbolizes the Jewish people’s attachment to the Land of Israel. It is a combination of the weather at this time of the year and the beauty and abundance of the agricultural products used for the observance of the holiday. This bounty fills our holiday tables and the Yom Tov menu reflects a spirit of rejuvenation that the population feels after the hot summer and the days of judgment.

In Israel, leaving one’s home to dwell in the outside booths that dot the landscape is seen as a sign of the redemption of the Jewish soul, reflected in our attachment to our ancient homeland and the L-rd’s gifts to the Jewish people.

The Jewish people are the most cosmopolitan group of human beings the world has ever seen. There is almost no country or area of the world where the Jewish people have not been present or visited. We have been everywhere on this globe and yet despite repeated efforts to make ourselves feel at home wherever we are, there is a gnawing feeling of restlessness that underlies the mansions and seeming security we have built for ourselves wherever we have dwelled.

From my own personal experience, I can attest that even though I was well settled in my previous places of residence in the United States – and I am eternally grateful to that great country for allowing the Jews freedom and opportunities never granted to them before in our long history of the exile – I never truly felt at home until I was able to settle here in Jerusalem and in the Land of Israel.

I do not mean this to be a rah-rah appeal for immigration to the Jewish State. But I do feel that only here in Israel can a Jew live a truly Jewish life in its every facet of meaning. And to me, Sukkot is the ultimate proof of this statement.

Many Jews arrive here to spend the holiday and I notice that the common thread of conversation and feeling regarding this holiday is the attachment it engenders within them and the feeling of being at home.

It is somewhat ironic that this feeling of being at home is inspired by a holiday that bids us to leave our homes and live a temporary existence without our usual comforts and conveniences. But that is the great message this holiday teaches us. Our comfort zone and feeling of security is not dependent upon our physical dwellings or where we live in the world.

Many a mansion and palace are filled with heartbreak, disappointment, strife and dysfunction. If one does not feel happy and secure on the inside, the outside will never provide him or her with that feeling of happiness and security. The rabbis always felt that a shack in Jerusalem was worthier and more protective than a great palace elsewhere.

It is this feeling that has driven millions of Jews to gather here from the four corners of the world to build a renewed and vital Jewish State. Not all of us came here willingly or voluntarily. Almost all of us have the right and ability to leave if we wish. Nevertheless, the level of satisfaction of life and of our existence here in Israel is one of the highest in the world, much higher than the level of happiness exhibited in other seemingly more prosperous and less dangerous places on the globe. That is the triumph of the message of Sukkot.

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Photo: Sharon Gabay
Our Sages ask, what is the common denominator of the four species shaken together on Sukkot – the etrog, lulav, hadas and arava? We know we bring them together because they are so different – in taste, in smell and in shape, but what is the one requirement common to them all?

Rabbeinu Bechaya explains that these four species all have a connection to water – they must be fresh in order to be used for the mitzvah on Sukkot. As the Gemara points out, if your lulav is dried out, you cannot use it. The same applies to the other species.

But why? What is this liquid and what does it mean for us? Rabbeinu Bechaya explains that water represents life. When we bring these four species together, we celebrate and give thanks to G-d that we are more alive than ever. We are now ready to dedicate that life to G-d in His infinite wisdom and kindness.

Along comes Sukkot and you know what we give thanks to G-d for? For the very fact that we’re alive. That we have breath in our lungs and blood pumping through our veins. That is why we bring together the four species, as fresh as can be, filled with as much moisture as possible, and we say the blessing of shehechiyanu: “Thank you G-d, Who has sustained us and kept us alive to reach this point.”

Now, let’s take this idea one step further. It’s not only about gratitude for being alive. Sukkot is a declaration of what we plan to do with this new life. We take the four species, we bow before G-d and we sing Hallel – recognizing G-d’s infinite greatness and magnificence, dedicating our gift of life to Him. And how do we do that? Through the Torah, the gateway to life.

The Torah is the Torah of life. “You shall keep my statutes and my laws that a person should do them and live by them” (Leviticus 18:4). The Ramban explains that the Torah is the blueprint for how to live life in this world in our interactions with other people. What is the best possible way to do that? Through the values, principles and laws of the Torah, which guide us on how to be a mensch, to be kind to people, to interact in good conscience with people.

It goes even deeper than this. By dedicating our lives to G-d – by taking opportunities to fulfill His mitzvot – we unlock the gift of another life... life in the World to Come. As Rashi says on that verse “…and you shall live by them” – refers to Olam Haba, the World to Come. The mitzvot we do in this world enrich us with life in the World to Come.

And here’s the really fascinating thing: the Hebrew word for life is חַיִּים, which is plural. We never speak about life, but lives. I came across an amazing explanation of this in a book by the Vilna Gaon’s brother, Rabbi Avraham Ben Shlomo Zalman. He says the word חַיִּים is plural because it refers to two lives, life in this world and life in the World to Come. Whenever we refer to life, we refer to both.

As Sukkot, the “festival of the time of our joy”, arrives, we thank G-d for life, not only in this world but for the infinite life He has allowed us in the World to Come. We give thanks and praise to Him for the Torah that He has given us – the gateway to life in both worlds.

The Hebrew word for water, מַיִם, just like חַיִּים, has no singular. We only refer to waters, never water. When we speak of water, we don’t only speak of physical waters, but of Torah – the ‘water’ that connects us to our spiritual source.

This Sukkot, let us recognize and celebrate the infinite gift of life. Let us dedicate ourselves to our Creator and His Torah – the source of all life and all blessings.

**Rabbi Dr. Warren Goldstein** is the Chief Rabbi of South Africa
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What exactly is a sukkah? What is it supposed to represent?

The question is essential to the mitzvah itself.

The Torah says: “Live in sukkot for seven days... so that your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in sukkot when I brought them out of Egypt” (Leviticus 23:42-43). In other words, knowing – reflecting, understanding, being aware – is an integral part of the mitzvah. For that reason, says Rabbah in the Talmud (Sukkah 2a), a sukkah that is taller than 20 cubits (about 30 feet) is invalid because when the sechach, the ‘roof,’ is that far above your head, you are unaware of it. So what is a sukkah?

On this, two Mishnaic sages disagreed. Rabbi Eliezer held that the sukkah represents the clouds of glory that surrounded the Israelites in the wilderness, protecting them from heat during the day, cold during the night, and bathing them with the radiance of the Divine presence. Rashi, in his commentary, takes it as the literal sense of the verse. On the other hand, Rabbi Akiva says sukkot mamash, meaning a sukkah is a sukkah, no more and no less: a hut, a booth, a temporary dwelling. It has no symbolism. It is what it is (Sukkah 11b).

If we follow Rabbi Eliezer then it is obvious why we celebrate by building a sukkah. It is there to remind us of a miracle. All three pilgrimage festivals are about miracles. Sukkot is about G-d’s tender care of his people, mitigating the hardships of the journey across the desert by surrounding them with His protective cloud as a parent wraps a young child in a blanket. Long afterward, the sight of the blanket evokes memories of the warmth of parental love.

Rabbi Akiva’s view, though, is deeply problematic. If a sukkah is merely a hut, what was the miracle? There is nothing unusual about living in a hut if you are living a nomadic existence in the desert. It’s what the Bedouin did until recently. Some still do. Why should there be a festival dedicated to something ordinary, commonplace and non-miraculous?

Rashbam says the sukkah was there to remind the Israelites of their past, so that at the very moment they were feeling the greatest satisfaction at living in Israel – at the time of the ingathering of the produce of the Land – they should remember their lowly origins. They were once a group of refugees without a home, never knowing when they would have to move on.

Sukkot, according to Rashbam, exists to remind us of our humble origins so that we never fall into the complacency of taking freedom, the Land of Israel and the blessings it yields, for granted, thinking that it happened in the normal course of history.

However, there is another way of understanding Rabbi Akiva, and it lies in one of the most important lines in prophetic literature. Jeremiah says, in words we recited on Rosh Hashanah, “I remember the loving-kindness of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown” (Jeremiah 2:2). This is one of the very rare lines in Tanach that speaks in praise not of G-d but of the people Israel.

“How odd of G-d to choose the Jews,” goes the famous rhyme, to which the answer is: “Not so odd: the Jews chose G-d.” They may have been, at times, fractious, rebellious, ungrateful and wayward. But they had the courage to travel, to move, to leave security behind, and follow G-d’s call, as did Avraham and Sarah at the dawn of our history.

If the sukkah represents G-d’s clouds of glory, where was “the loving-kindness of your youth”? There is no sacrifice involved if G-d is visibly protecting you in every way and at all times. But if we follow Rabbi Akiva and see the sukkah as what it is, the temporary home of a temporarily homeless people, then it makes sense to say that Israel showed the courage of a bride willing to follow her husband on a risk-laden journey to a place she has never seen before – a love that shows itself through her willingness to live in a hut, trusting her husband’s promise that one day they will have a permanent home.

On this reading, Sukkot becomes a metaphor for the Jewish condition.
not only during the 40 years in the desert but also during the almost 2,000 years spent in exile and dispersion. For centuries, Jews lived not knowing whether the place in which they lived would prove to be a mere temporary dwelling. To take just one period as an example: Jews were expelled from England in 1290, and during the next two centuries from almost every country in Europe, culminating in the Spanish Expulsion in 1492, and the Portuguese in 1497. They lived in a state of permanent insecurity. Sukkot is the festival of insecurity.

What is truly remarkable is that by tradition it is called zeman simchateinu, “our time of joy.” That to me is the wonder at the heart of the Jewish experience: that Jews throughout the ages were able to experience risk and uncertainty at every level of their existence and yet – while they sat betzila demehem-nuta, “under the shadow of faith” (Zohar, Emor, 103a) – they were able to rejoice. That is spiritual courage of a high order. I have often argued that faith is not certainty: faith is the courage to live with uncertainty. That is what Sukkot represents if what we celebrate is sukkot mamash, not the clouds of glory but the vulnerability of actual huts, open to the wind, the rain and the cold.

Today, I find that faith in the people and the State of Israel. It is astonishing to me how Israelis have been able to live with an almost constant threat of war and terror since the State was born, and not give way to fear. I sense a profound faith even in the most secular Israelis, not perhaps religious in the conventional sense, but faith nonetheless: in life, and the future, and hope. Israelis seem to me to exemplify what tradition says was G-d’s reply to Moses when he doubted the people’s capacity to believe: “They are believers, the children of believers” (Shabbat 97a).

Today’s Israel is a living embodiment of what it is to exist in a state of insecurity and still rejoice.

And that is Sukkot’s message to the world. Sukkot is the only festival about which Tanach says will one day be celebrated by the whole world (Zechariah 14: 16-19). The 21st century is teaching us what this might mean. For most of history, people have experienced a universe that did not change fundamentally in their lifetimes. But there have been rare great ages of transition: the birth of agriculture, the first cities, the dawn of civilization, the invention of printing, and the industrial revolution. These were destabilizing times and they brought disruption in their wake. The age of transition we have experienced in our lifetime, born primarily out of the invention of the computer and instantaneous global communication, will one day be seen as the greatest and most rapid era of change since Homo sapiens first set foot on earth.

Since September 11, 2001, we have experienced the convulsions. As I write these words, some nations are tearing themselves apart, and no nation is free of the threat of terror. There are parts of the Middle East and beyond that recall Hobbes’ famous description of the “state of nature,” a “war of every man against every man” in which there is “continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” (Hobbes, The Leviathan, chapter XIII). Insecurity begets fear, fear begets hate, hate begets violence, and violence eventually turns against its perpetrators.

The 21st century will one day be seen by historians as the Age of Insecurity. We, as Jews, are the world’s experts in insecurity, having lived with it for millennia. And the supreme response to insecurity is Sukkot, when we leave behind the safety of our houses and sit in sukkot mamash, in huts exposed to the elements. To be able to do so and still say, this is zeman simchateinu, our festival of joy, is the supreme achievement of faith, the ultimate antidote to fear.

Faith is the ability to rejoice in the midst of instability and change, travelling through the wilderness of time toward an unknown destination. Faith is not fear. Faith is not hate. Faith is not violence. These are vital truths, never more needed than now.

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Both in our Tefillot, as well as in Kiddush, the festival of Sukkot is described as “The Season of Joy” (זְמַן שִׂמְחָתֵנוּ).

While all of the Three Foot Festivals (שְׁלֹשֶׁת הָרְגָלִים) require halachic expressions of joy, the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:14) singles out Sukkot as the address for this central mitzvah – וְשָׂמַחְתָּ בְּחַגֶּךָ – and you shall be joyous in your chag.

Interestingly, the Rambam (Hilchot Lulav 8:12) adds that the Sukkot festival is endowed with upgraded joy (שִׂמְחָה יְתֵרָה) based on the verse: “… and you shall rejoice before G-d for seven days” (Leviticus 23:40). The source of this joyous occasion is two-fold. On the basic level, the Torah (Exodus 23: 16) declares a celebration for the ingathering of grain. Rashi explains: “For during all the days of summer, the grain is drying in the fields. But on Sukkot, they gather it into the house because of the rains.” Indeed, the Sukkot festival marks both the end of the agricultural year in Eretz Yisrael, as well as its beginning once again. The festive mood celebrating the ingathering of grain changes immediately into a solemn mood anticipating the much-desired rainfall for the coming season.

It is to this end that our Sages teach us: “…and on Sukkot, we are judged concerning water” (Rosh Hashanah 1:2). The understanding that genuine concerns for adequate rainfall are first and foremost on our minds on Sukkot forms the basis of the various mitzvot and halachot of the chag.

Our Sages indicate (Ta’anit 2) that the very taking of the Four Species serves as a prelude for the prayer for rain: וְאַרְבַּעַת הַמִּינִים הַלָּלוּ אֵינָן בָּאִין אֶלָּא לְרַצּוֹת עַל הַמַּיִם, “and these four species only come to appease for the water.” This is amplified by the halachic requirement to once again begin the formal inclusion of מַשִּׁיב הָרוּחַ וּמוֹרִיד הַגֶּשֶׁם in our tefillah at the end of the Sukkot festival (or at the beginning, according to one opinion in the Mishnah).

Furthermore, in Temple days, the water libation ceremony (נִסּוּךְ הַמַּיִם) was added to the service of the day, as our Sages have explained: “so that the annual rainfall shall be a blessing to all” (Rosh Hashanah 16).

However, beyond the basic level described above, the joy on Sukkot transcends into the spiritual sphere as well. The Midrashic concept (Bava Kama 72) of substituting water for Torah (אִם שָׂם תּוֹרָה) lends understanding to the common practice of celebrating Simchat Torah at the end of Sukkot. Just as the physical “water year” comes to a close – and begins once again – on Sukkot, so, too, the “spiritual water year” ends – and begins anew – at the Sukkot season.

In both scenarios – physical and spiritual – emphasis should be placed upon the renewal aspect. Clearly, the mitzvot and halachot of Sukkot focus upon the renewal side (“... and on Sukkot, we are judged concerning water”). So, too, the joy of Simchat Torah should focus upon the re-dedication of our study of Torah. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik once related that his father, Rav Moshe Soloveitchik, serving in his first year as town Rabbi in Haslovicz, declined the aliya of Chatan Torah on Simchat Torah – that most honorable aliya concluding the Torah – but preferred the Chatan Bereishit aliya, which begins the Torah reading cycle once again!

We pray for the blessing of מַשִּׁיב הָרוּחַ וּמוֹרִיד הַגֶּשֶׁם, both in the physical sense (גַּשְׁמִיּוּת), along with the spiritual dimension (רוּחָנִיּוּת), for ourselves and for Klal Yisrael.

Rabbi Dr. Aaron Adler is a former student of, and special assistant to, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.
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PHANTOM RAIN
A natural phenomenon in which rain evaporates before it reaches the ground. Very common in deserts. In this case, rain pours down from the sky but the ground never gets moist. In other words, it looks like it’s raining but it isn’t!

THE DRIEST PLACE ON EARTH IS NOT THE DESERT
Antarctica gets only 6.5 inches of rain or snow per year, making it the continent with the lowest annual rainfall by far. On the other end of the spectrum, Lloro, Colombia, absorbs more than 500 inches of rainfall per year. North America is relatively dry by comparison, collecting 256 inches of rain annually.

A SCIENTIFICALLY PROVEN WAY TO GET LESS WET IN THE RAIN
Run! As Henry Reich, the brains behind the YouTube Channel MinutePhysics, explains, the faster you get out of the rain, the drier you’ll be, regardless of the additional raindrops you run into.

WHY YOU LOVE THE SMELL OF RAIN
Why does rain produce a pleasant aroma after it falls? Because of a molecule called geosmin, created by soil-dwelling bacteria. When rain falls, it creates air pockets, which contain small amounts of geosmin. The rain traps and then releases these air pockets, dispersing geosmin into the air, where it’s free to travel to human sniffers. The smell of rain even has a name: Petrichor.

VETEIN TAL UMATAR LIVRACHA
The Jews of ancient Israel made three pilgrimages to Jerusalem each year, for the holidays of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. The official rainy season began on Shemini Atzeret, when the Jews were about to start their journey back home after the festival of Sukkot. As much as they wanted the rain, they chose to delay their supplications in the interests of a safer and easier trip.

That is how the practice of delaying vetein tal umatar (give dew and rain for a blessing, the addition to the ninth bracha in the Amidah) began.

In Israel, the prayer was begun only 15 days after Shemini Atzeret (hence in Israel we start saying it on the 7th of Cheshvan), allowing enough time for even the Jews living near the Euphrates to return home.

Outside of Israel, a more complicated calculation became necessary. For much of our history, the primary Jewish community in the Diaspora was in Babylonia (modern-day Iraq), where the terrain is on a lower altitude than Israel’s, and they do not need rain until much later.

Therefore, the Sages instituted that Jews living in the Diaspora should start praying for rain only 60

In shuls all over the world, Shemini Atzeret is the day we pray for rain in Eretz Yisrael. Here are some fascinating facts about rain in Israel and in general.
days after the start of the halachic autumn, which is known as Tekufat Tishrei. Hence the Diaspora starts saying tal umatar on December 4th or 5th.

What happens if one starts saying tal umatar immediately after Sukkot, before 7th Cheshvan?

Rav Rimon writes: If one makes a mistake there is no need to repeat the Amidah (see Mishnah Berura 117, who says it’s worthy to repeat it as a voluntary prayer).

Certainly in Eretz Yisrael, where rain is more essential, one need not repeat one’s Amidah if one errs.

And what if you’re in Israel on 7th Cheshvan and fly overseas before December 5th, what do you say overseas – vetein tal umatar or vetein bracha?

Since the person began saying vetein tal umatar in Israel, he should continue saying it even overseas. However, if he is the chazan, he should adopt the local custom.
The 1973 Yom Kippur War was actually also the Sukkot War because it continued through Sukkot. A few years ago, a 40th anniversary of the war was held at Yeshivat HaKotel. The attendees – many of whom had fought in the war – remembered how, during the battles, they had sung the verses of Hallel. Some told of how they had lost friends in the mornings and then tried to rejoice and dance in the evenings, an attempt to recreate the Simchat Beit HaShoeva of Sukkot. A holiday that is all about joy and nature had become a tense time of fears and bloodshed. It is interesting though, that even within the inferno, what bothered these religious soldiers were the halachic details of their situation. Hundreds of soldiers found themselves on Sukkot without the Arba’at Minim, without holiday prayer arrangements, without Torah scrolls and most importantly, without sukkot.

For example, then Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Yeshayahu Hadari, told the following story: “It was Tuesday evening in the Suez Canal. The tension was tremendous. After two days of intense fighting and heavy casualties, Brigadier Avraham Baram briefed his soldiers before the next battle. He finished his brief by asking: ‘Is everything clear, does anyone have any questions?’ ‘Yes,’ said Yitzhak Tzfatman, a soldier from Yeshivat HaKotel. ‘Tomorrow night is the holiday of Sukkot. We would like to you to get us some Arba’a Minim’.”

Rav Hadari continued: “After the war, this commander – who considered himself far from being Torah-observant – said that if the earth had been shaking beneath his feet and swallowing him up, he would have been less surprised than from this strange request. The Arba’a Minim in the middle of a war?

“But Tzfatman insisted: ‘We must have the Arba’a Minim.’ And indeed, When Commander Baram submitted the request for equipment that evening, he added: ‘And send the Arba’a Minim too.’

The next morning the Arba’a Minim arrived with the rest of the equipment.

Tzfatman asked Baram to shake the lulav and say the bracha and explained to him that the fighters would merit from him doing this mitzvah. They would win the war. Along with the lulav, the aravot, hadassim and etrog, he also gave him a book written by IDF Chief-of-Staff Yigal Yadin.

At the time, Yadin’s archaeological discovery of an ancient epistle had just been published. The fragment they had found described how during a battle on Sukkot, Bar Kochba insisted he had the Arba’a Minim. He had written a letter to a man named Yehuda Bar Menashe, informing him that he will send two of his own donkeys to the Ein Gedi area to be loaded with lulavs and etrogs for his entire camp.

Tzfatman wanted to show Baram that even 2,000 years ago, during the war with the Romans, Bar Kochba also had the commandment of Arba’a Minim on his mind and was determined that his soldiers could observe the mitzvah.”

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The Book of Life

As a child, I was a library girl, with membership to three or four different libraries around town. Reading and learning were always associated with a librarian who whispered: “Shhh” (usually the whisper was louder than the chatter being silenced). But on Simchat Torah, with the holiest book of all, and without any librarian silencing us, we dance in the synagogue and on the street, declaring the greatness of this book.

Why do we dance with closed Torah scrolls on Simchat Torah? After all, aren’t we supposed to study the Torah and not sing with it? The Lubavitcher Rebbe explained it this way: “Even before understanding the Torah, the main thing is the holiness of the Torah!” This is precisely the difference between a story book, or a math textbook, and the Torah. The goal is not just study and research, but the mental connection, and the joy, excitement and love. People dance in the town square because the Torah is not a library book, but a book of life.
A key to understanding the core elements of a Yom Tov is to see how Chazal describe the chag in our tefillah. Pesach is referred to as Zeman Cheruteinu (the time of our freedom), Shavuot as Zeman Matan Torahteinu (the time of the giving of our Torah). Both of these appellations refer to a historical reality reflecting that time. However, Sukkot seems to be the exception; it is referred to as Zeman Simchateinu (the time of our joy). In what way does this designation relate specifically to Sukkot if all holidays have a requirement to be in a state of simcha (happiness)?

The Vilna Gaon, in his commentary on Shir HaShirim, remarks that as a consequence of the Sin of the Golden Calf, Klal Yisrael lost the Clouds of Glory that they received upon their exodus from Egypt. The period between the 17th of Tammuz and Yom Kippur was an intense period between the 17th of Tammuz (the time of our exodus from Egypt) and Yom Kippur was an intense period (repentance) and teshuvah (returning to a historical reality; a time of intense joy, when Am Yisrael felt they were finally forgiven for the Sin of the Golden Calf, and their special relationship with G-d was restored.

Every year, as we sit in the sukkah, we are reminded of the gift of the Clouds of Glory and feel the special love renewed at this time. With this we can appreciate Chazal’s statement: if it rains on the first night of Sukkot (in Israel) it is a bad omen. The Talmud likens this to a servant who pours a cup of wine for his master, and the master spills it out. Although there are many times we may be prevented from doing mitzvot – and for that, we are not held responsible – when it rains, and we cannot sit in the sukkah, it is an unfortunate sign that G-d does not desire our mitzvot and closeness.

The joy of Sukkot is the joy of mitzvot, the joy of connection. We do more mitzvot on Sukkot than on any other chag. Indeed, the Rambam maintains that the obligation to be joyful in doing mitzvot is inferred from the laws of Sukkot. Although kavannah (intention) is imperative throughout the year, it is specifically on Sukkot that we need to embrace both the joy of the mitzvah with the service of the One commanding us as well.

There is an additional dimension to Zeman Simchateinu. When sitting in the sukkah, we should not only be thinking of the Clouds of Glory. We should also be thinking about the physical huts that we lived in during our sojourn in the desert. The word “sukkah” is derived from “sechach,” the feeble covering of the sukkah. The sechach can’t be connected to anything that grows from the ground, nor can it be positioned under anything else. These halachot bring to mind our total dependence on G-d. The Sefat Emes teaches that when a person completely relies on G-d he can then enter into a state of pure simcha. He even likens the sukkah to the Garden of Eden, about which we say in the Sheva Brachot, „שהמה יצרך בַּבַע תְּעוֹלָם; „As You gladdened Your creation in the Garden of Eden of old.”

Rabbi Reiss, in Pa’amei Moed, encourages us to focus on the imagery of a baby who feels utterly secure in the knowledge that he is being cared for and has no worries in the world. Sitting in the sukkah, we are sitting in the Garden of Eden, about which we say in the Sheva Brachot, of pure simcha, that exceptional shade of emunah.

The Ari HaKadosh notes that the minimum requirement for a sukkah is two walls and a bit of a third one. Rav Pincus takes this idea and tells us to visualize the sukkah as a big hug from G-d! Is there any greater joy than feeling we are in the presence of G-d, knowing that He loves us and is here to take care of us, like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?

Seven days of joy. Seven days of connection. Seven days to strengthen our relationship with G-d and revel in His presence. Seven days akin to Sheva Brachot, renewing our union with G-d. What a meaningful expression of Zeman Simchateinu!

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Of all the holidays celebrated during the month of Tishrei, Simchat Torah is certainly one of the highlights.

Outside of Israel, this is the ninth day of Sukkot and here in Israel, the holiday is combined with Shemini Atzeret.

In the distant past, the reading of the Torah would only be completed after a three-year cycle and it was not designed to end on a specific day. The Torah itself has no mention of this day either, nor the obligation to finish the Torah cycle or what the particulars of this holiday should be.

So what does the Torah expect of us on Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah?

The scholars in the Midrash explain that every day of Sukkot involved bringing korbanot, sacrifices, on behalf of all the nations of the world.

In contrast, the korbanot brought on Shemini Atzeret were given solely on behalf of Am Yisrael. If all the nations didn’t join with us in bringing korbanot on this day, what was missing during Sukkot that had to be completed on Shemini Atzeret?

The answer apparently lies in the fact that on Sukkot we come with defined goals – crowning G-d through the shofar, attaining atonement through the two goats (se’irim), and on Sukkot itself, celebrating with the Arba’a Minim (Four Species) and the libations. Each item and time has its own specific purpose and meaning.

Now, on Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah, G-d wants us to just be – to celebrate without any specific action or command.

This is our Torah. This is not a holiday of learning Torah but rather a holiday full of joy, celebrating who we are. The joy of the fact that we as a people are children of G-d.

Indeed, the entire process that occurs throughout the month of Tishrei is geared to that very purpose.

That is the whole story.

Children can return home for a family wedding or bar mitzvah or some other purpose, but the greatest joy is when they come home because they just want to be together.

G-d didn’t instruct us on how to celebrate Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah, but the fact that the Jewish people want to dance with G-d and the Torah is the greatest gift He could have given us.

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In the 44th of his collected letters, Rav Kook depicts the historical evolution of human religion. He says that humans have moved, and continue to move, from separation and distance to unity and closeness, from relationships based on fear to relationships based on love. He says that as people become closer to G-d, our service of G-d stops being about serving some transcendent being ‘over there’ and starts being about finding and expressing G-d within our reality, our values and our interactions.

This is the deep idea underlying one of Rav Kook’s important teachings about how we study the Torah.

Many people have left religion because in their learning and spiritual perfection, they betrayed their unique personalities. For example, a person may be naturally talented in matters of aggadah and be unsuited to constant immersion in matters of halacha. Yet because he does not recognize his unique talents, he occupies himself in matters of Gemara and its commentaries, since he sees that this is customary in the religious world today. But deep inside his soul, he feels hatred toward the material he is learning, since constant involvement in it does not suit his unique natural gifts.

However, if he were to find the specific type of Torah that fits his unique talents and immerse himself in it, he would then immediately recognize that the nauseating feeling he experienced when involved in matters of halacha was not coming from any flaw in that holy and important type of learning. It was rather his soul expressing its desire to be absorbed in another type of Torah.

Torah, Rav Kook says, is not something foreign that we must force upon ourselves from the sake of the Torah. The Torah is compared to the sea in its infinite breadth and depth; in a sense, it includes something for everyone. Everyone can find a part of the Torah that appeals to them.

G-d made each of us unique individuals, with specific areas of interest and skill. Some are better at math while others are better at dancing, some love to write while others love to play sports. So too when it comes to studying Torah. Some love learning Gemara, while others prefer studying Mussar. Some people are better at halacha, while others are gifted when it comes to piyyutim. Personally, I have always connected to more philosophical works, while the study of halacha remains difficult for me, despite the years I have put into it.

Given our uniqueness, Rav Kook says, we should not force ourselves to conform to a rigid Torah curriculum, where everyone learns exactly the same thing. We should seek out the parts of Torah that inspire and excite us. “A person only learns where his heart desires.”

While we should not abandon any part of Torah, what inspires us individually is where we should invest most of our time and effort.

Perhaps in the past, in the age of the great yeshivot of Europe, everyone learned the same thing. But as Rav Kook’s letter says, our service of G-d evolves from fear toward love, from alienation toward identification. Learning Torah shouldn’t be about suppressing the individual, it should help us see how each person is a unique expression of G-d. Only when our Torah shines through each person’s talents and interests will we have moved from a Torah of fear to a Torah of love.

This is beautifully expressed by one of Rav Kook’s successors, Rav Shagar: “The truth of the Torah of Mashiach is based on aesthetics, not rationality, and the essence of learning will focus on... loving Torah and delighting in it... The Torah of Mashiach enables us to open up to... love, play, and imagination.”

The Torah of Mashiach represents the future of Rav Kook’s evolution of the service of G-d. The Torah of the Messianic Era, of redemption, a Torah we enjoy and which sparks our imagination. When we celebrate the joy and love of the Torah, we aren’t celebrating the Torah’s historical accuracy or scientific exactitude. We’re celebrating how it excites us and how much we love living a life of Torah, a life in relationship with G-d – a taste of the Torah of Mashiach here in the present.

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2 Shemot Rabbah 41:6.
3 Avodah Zara 19a.
5 Rabbi Levi Morrow teaches Jewish Philosophy at various institutions in Jerusalem
The Midrash (Yalkut Emor 651) comments on the verse, “You should take for you on the first day,” that Sukkot is the first day for the accounting of sins. Many explanations are offered to explain this difficult Midrash.

The Shlah HaKadosh explains that in the four days between Yom Kippur and Sukkot, people are so busy preparing for Sukkot that they have no time to sin. Others say that the influence of Yom Kippur and its power to expiate sins extends into these four days.

Rabbi Yehonatan Eibshitz writes in Ya’arot Dvash that the gematria of “the Satan” is 364, from which the Sages learn that the Satan, the evil urge, has power 364 days of the year, and not on Yom Kippur. The letter heh signifies that the Satan has reduced control on five of the remaining days. These are the days between Yom Kippur and Sukkot (counting a portion of the first day of Sukkot as the fifth day).

The effect of Yom Kippur is so overwhelming and inspiring that a Jew is catapulted to a level far beyond his real attainment. We are judged according to our level, and therefore someone on a higher level is judged more harshly for the same sin than someone on a lower level. Thus if G-d were to judge us immediately after Yom Kippur according to our level at that time, the result would be an unduly harsh judgment.

Just as before Rosh Hashanah we are given a minimum of four days of Selichot in order to prepare ourselves to enter Rosh Hashanah as a blemishless sacrifice, so we are given four days after Yom Kippur to settle back to our real level. The accounting of our sins during these four days is then retroactively calculated according to the level we reach on the first day of Sukkot. These four days are like a deep-sea diver’s decompression chamber.

Another aspect of these euphoric four days is the fact that we are so charged emotionally and so busy preparing the materials for Sukkot that even when we sin, those sins are rarely premeditated or calculated. Similarly, the preparations are also executed in a frenzied mood of elation that leaves little time or place for calculation and meditation. To a certain degree, this elation is positive. It corresponds to the days after that first Yom Kippur in the desert in which the materials for the Mishkan were donated and the people gave with unbridled emotion, without any calculation of necessity. Finally, Moshe had to call a halt to this unbridled giving and announce, “Enough.”

MOSES’ DEATH

This powerful emotion is the raw material to be shaped with reflection into a Mishkan. The Torah relates in Parashat Ha’azinu that G-d bid Moses to ascend Mount Nevo to expire “in the midst of the day.” The entire people had said they would try to prevent Moses’ death. The obvious question is: what could they have done to prevent Moses from dying?

Nothing. But the people were so emotionally charged with love for Moses – despite the month-long rebuke to which they had been subjected – that rational calculation did not exist. By commanding Moses to go up at midday to show their helplessness to prevent his passing, G-d, at the same time, publicized this commendable desire of the Jewish people. Later, the unbounded love for Moses was refined and shaped into the loyalty which the people transferred to Joshua.

The four days between Yom Kippur and Sukkot correspond to the four letters of G-d’s Ineffable Name. Our feelings during these four days are raw material to be shaped in calm reflection, and transformed into our calculated service of G-d on the first days of Sukkot.

May we utilize the special opportunity of these four days to prepare for Sukkot and the mitzvah of lulav, symbolic of our victory on Yom Kippur, and by channeling the intense emotion with which we emerge from Yom Kippur so that it extends its influence into the entire year.
t the Kotel on Chol Hamoed Sukkot one often finds generous people giving others their Arba’a Minim (Four Species) to shake. Even people who already did the mitzvah will shake again. While at first glance it might not seem that there is a link between the Arba’a Minim and Jerusalem’s Old City, the Rambam thought there was.

The source of the mitzvah is: “And you shall take for yourself on the first day [of Sukkot] the fruit of the goodly tree (etrog), an unopened palm frond (lulav), and boughs of thick trees (hadassim), and willows (aravot) [that grow near] the brook, and you shall rejoice before, your G-d for seven days” (Leviticus 23:40).

Chazal viewed this verse as one unit and connected the idea of rejoicing before G-d with the Arba’a Minim. The Mishna (Sukkah 3:12) explains that when the Beit HaMikdash stood, the lulav (the Mishna’s term for the Arba’a Minim) was taken for seven days “in the Mikdash,” while “in the medina,” the country, for just one day. The Mishna continues that when the Temple was destroyed, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai established that the lulav should be shaken everywhere for all seven days (except Shabbat) zecher laMikdash, in commemoration of the Temple. Therefore, today, whether in Beit Shemesh or Monsey, the mitzvah of lulav is considered of biblical origin on the first day of Sukkot and a rabbinic enactment on the rest of the days.

Most commentators understand the Mishna’s use of the word “Mikdash” to mean in the Temple itself, and “medina” includes Yerushalayim along with the rest of Israel, as Rashi says explicitly. The Rambam, in his Commentary to the Mishna, explains that “medina” includes all areas of Israel except Yerushalayim, and in this context “Mikdash” includes Yerushalayim.

Rabbi Soloveitchik (Hararei Kedem 139) suggested that the Rambam did not rule like this, as in the Yad HaChazaka, “Mikdash” is used to specifically mean the area of the Beit HaMikdash.

Rabbi Ya’akov Ettlinger (Bikkurei Ya’akov 658) wrote that according to the Rambam, lulav is a biblical mitzvah in Yerushalayim all seven days. This has practical halachic ramifications, including deciding whether the Four Species are kosher (ruling stringently), the invalidation of a chaser (a missing piece) applies all seven days, as does that of borrowing, and that one should intend to fulfill a potential biblical mitzvah.

Rabbi Tukitchinsky (Ir HaKodesh veHaMikdash 21:3), while disagreeing about the invalidations, agrees with the fundamental idea. He explains that the Rambam’s position was based on the holiness of Yerushalayim being a byproduct of the holiness of the (site of the) Temple, which stems from the Shechina, and that holiness is perpetual, continuing even subsequent to the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. Rav Tukitchinsky clarifies that the entire discussion about Jerusalem relates only to those areas of Jerusalem sanctified during the Second Temple period, i.e. the Old City, Mount Zion, and Ir David, and does not include the newer parts of the city.

On the flip side, most authorities understand the Mishna like Rashi, that Yerushalayim is included in “medina,” and the Rambam did not explicitly say otherwise in his halachic work. Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch says that to rule like the Rambam puts one in a position of possibly violating the prohibition of bal tosif, adding mitzvot. Therefore, many people who visit the Kotel on Chol HaMoed do not shake lulav again.

However, there are many looking for an opportunity to potentially fulfill one more biblical mitzvah; one tied to simchat haChag. So while Rav Sternbach notes that there is no obligation to travel to Yerushalayim to shake the Arba’a Minim, many Jews who go to the Kotel do search out a set to shake. He also says that the same concern of bal tosif exists with the tefillin of Rabbenu Tam, where one needs to have the intent that they are wearing Rabbenu Tam tefillin in Jerusalem’s Old City during Chol Hamoed sukka, tefillin if the halacha is like him. So too, when shaking the lulav, one can have in mind that if the halacha is like the Rambam in his Commentary to the Mishna, they are fulfilling a biblical obligation.

This gives those fortunate to be in Jerusalem’s Old City during Chol Hamoed Sukkot one more benefit – the possibility of a special, joyous, biblical mitzvah linked to the holiness of the Mikdash.

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THE BEAUTY OF DIVERSITY

Stepping into a synagogue on Sukkot can be an arresting experience. You will most likely have to pinch yourself to make sure you’re not dreaming. You will encounter a group of ostensibly normal, well-educated, respectable people chanting and walking in circles while fervently waving pieces of vegetation in the air. This charming, if slightly bizarre-looking custom is a fulfillment of the biblical commandment to bind together four specific plant species – an etrog, lulav, hadassim and aravot. Jewish custom has long mandated the incorporation of these plants into the prayers on Sukkot, the elaborate rituals of which constitute an essential crux of the festival experience. These four species, so strange upon first observation, are in fact suffused with rich symbolism and stand as physical representations of some of Judaism’s most important ideas and treasured values.

One prominent symbolic idea links the Four Species to different stages of religious worthiness. The etrog has both a significant taste and fragrance, representing righteous individuals who both study Torah and perform good deeds. The date-producing lulav has a distinct taste but no fragrance, representing those who study but fail to actualize what they learn. The hadassim produce a wonderful fragrance but lack taste, representing those who perform good deeds but do not study their deeper meaning. Finally, devoid of both taste and fragrance, the aravot symbolize those who neither study Torah nor practice its precepts.

The Midrash states that G-d “declares that they should all be bound together as a single bunch so that they may atone for one another.” This formulation is extraordinary, as one would have expected the rabbinic source to declare that the righteous atone for the sins of all the others. Yet the depths of this text contain a far more prescient and sensitive idea: that everyone, from the supremely righteous down to the supremely mediocre, has something to contribute to the grand narrative, a positive character trait that they alone can teach everyone else. Each individual is needed to complement the failings of everyone else. By combining these fruits together, we state loud and clear that G-d does not want uniformity, a nation of clones that look suspiciously upon the ‘other.’ Rather, He mandates the inclusion of all types of people into our community, enjoining us to fully engage each one of our fellow Jews, and – while not being blind to their shortcomings – focus our attention and energies on their positive traits, which we wish to incorporate into our own lives.

The greatest exemplar of this in the modern era was Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, a giant of Jewish thought and communal leadership during the early decades of the 20th century. The Ultra-Orthodox Yeshiva world, from which he emerged, roundly condemned secular Zionist Jews as heretics and villains, having entirely thrown off their religion and broken away from traditional Jewish life in order to create a secular Yishuv, community, in Israel. But Rav Kook refused to see his fellow Jews in this light. In his eyes, these secular Jews were ‘Holy Rebels,’ who were spending their lives assiduously resuscitating and building up the Land of Israel. They were taking care of all the physical needs of the Jewish homeland – the development of agriculture, defense, business, infrastructure, and various governmental institutions – providing a foundation for the spiritual renaissance of the Jewish nation, a forerunner to the upcoming Messianic era. These secular pioneers were, in their own way, doing G-d’s work, contributing significantly and uniquely to the actualization of the Divine plan. As such, they must be seen by the religious community as loyal Jews, whose work is valued and encouraged. Rav Kook’s worldview demanded the inclusion of all four species of Jews.

The Torah values the tremendous diversity among the Jewish nation and desires the unique offering of each individual. These verses express a pluralistic ethos within a framework of national cohesion and unity. While encouraging a wide range of interests, pursuits, innovations, character traits and ideologies, and granting autonomous space for all 12 tribes to develop their natural strengths and proclivities, the Torah insists on one caveat: all must donate something to the grand national project, and all must value the contributions of the others. When an entire nation ascends to celebrate a festival together, everyone – whether great or ordinary – can and must partake. This idea, encompassed in the four species of plants, expresses the beauty of Sukkot in a truly unique way.

1 Leviticus Rabbah 30:12; Pesikta D’rav Kahanah 27:9.
2 Rabbi A. I. Kook, Orot HaTechiyah sec. 22 and sec. 44.

Rabbi Benji Levy is CEO of Mosaic United
As we approach the rainy season in Israel, many become excited by the possibility of snow, while others are scared by the very thought. For observant Jews, it also raises a host of halachic questions. We will address some of them in this article.

**PLAYING WITH SNOW ON SHABBAT**

Is snow muktza on Shabbat? Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank, the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, was asked this question during a snowstorm in 1957. He responded that just like rain is not muktza, neither is snow. He also noted that the Talmud (Shabbat 51b) discusses crushing snow on Shabbat without mentioning that it might be muktza.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Iggerot Moshe, Orach Chaim 5:22) writes that snow isn’t like rain and rules that snow that falls on Shabbat is muktza since it didn’t exist before Shabbat. Rabbi Yisrael Pinchas Bodner (The Halachos of Muktza, p. 165 n. 10) adds that Rabbi Moshe Feinstein told him that snow is similar to “sticks and stones” – functionless objects – which are muktza. If so, even snow that fell before Shabbat is muktza.

Most poskim disagree with Rav Moshe, including Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (see Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata 16:44). He argues that one may touch, move, and even play with snow on Shabbat. However, making snowballs or snowmen is a different story. Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata rules that making snowballs is forbidden on Shabbat due to the prohibition of boneh (building). He bases this ruling on the Rambam (Hilchot Shabbat 7:6), who writes that making cheese is prohibited due to boneh, as a person “gathers together different parts” to make it. Rav Auerbach (ibid. n. 109) rules that one may throw snowballs prepared before Shabbat. Interestingly, Rabbi Moshe Stern (Be’er Moshe 6:30) rules that making snowballs, which quickly fall apart, does not violate the prohibition of boneh, and therefore children may make snowballs on Shabbat. Building a snowman, however, is forbidden as it is a more permanent structure. And one may not make shapes out of snow, or write in it, as doing so is considered a form of writing (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 340:4; Mishna Berurah 20).

**PREPARING FOR AND SHOVELING SNOW**

May one spread salt on public paths to prevent injury on Shabbat? Most Rishonim imply that crushing ice is only forbidden if the person crushing it intends to use the resultant water. No-one who salts snow or ice has such an intention. Furthermore, spreading salt does not melt snow and ice; rather it “causes” (grama) it to melt, which at most violates a rabbinic prohibition. Therefore, since snow and ice constitute a danger to the public, it is permitted to salt public paths and sidewalks (Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata 25:9).

Is it permitted to shovel snow on Shabbat? Most Acharonim don’t consider snow to be muktza, and therefore it may be moved on Shabbat. Even if snow were muktza, muktza may be moved indirectly especially if public safety is a concern. However, shoveling is only permitted on a paved path or sidewalk, not on earth, due to the prohibition of choresh (smoothing out the ground). Also, one should be careful not to denigrate Shabbat by overly exerting oneself (Machaze Avraham 68) – although for the sake of a mitzvah exerting oneself is permitted.

Rabbi Menashe Klein (Mishne Halachot 5:4) entertains the possibility that a person can shovel snow in an area without an eruv since rabbinic prohibitions are sometimes set aside if danger is involved. While he is hesitant to permit shoveling in an area without an eruv, he permits asking or hiring a non-Jew to shovel snow on Shabbat. Asking or hiring him before Shabbat would be advisable.

One should not endanger oneself when snow or ice covers sidewalks and streets. Thus, the elderly, and others who may be more likely to fall, should stay home rather than trying to walk through dangerous or slippery terrain in order to make it to shul on Shabbat.

Rabbi David Brofsky is an author and educator who teaches in Yeshivot and Seminaries in Israel

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I find the contrast of Sukkot next to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur amazing. We just spent 10 heavy days, from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, immersed in intensive introspection, probing the depth of our souls to uncover our flaws and confront our mistakes, expressing heartfelt remorse for our wrongdoings and courageously committing ourselves to long-lasting changes.

Then, the very next day after Yom Kippur, we are out and about like playful children admiring the beauty of nature; looking at etrogim, palm branches, willows and myrtles. And we are building and decorating clubhouses – the sukkah.

What’s going on?

Although we value the maturity of the repentance process – we paid a price for the process. The heavy concentration and intensity of the last 10 days often weakens us and damages the spontaneity and joy of our inner child.

The seriousness of repentance takes its toll on the joyfulness of life and our naturalness. Although repentance is a process of spiritual healing, there are side effects that need to be attended to. Even though we are over the sickness, we need to become healthy, whole and strong again.

We need to reconnect with our vitality and life force. On Sukkot we recover our playfulness and our zest for life.

Pesach is referred in the holiday prayers as the “time of our freedom.” Shavuot is called “the time of the giving of our Torah.” However, Sukkot is described as the “time of our happiness.” On Sukkot we reclaim the joy and liveliness of our inner child and remember “Toyrah R Us.”

Sukkot is also referred to as the “time of our happiness” because it celebrates our successful completion of the arduous journey of our penitence that began on Rosh Hashanah.

There is much to rejoice over when you feel like you get a new lease on life after finally completing the challenging process from judgment, regret, and resolution to forgiveness. This is similar to a couple who violated their loving relationship with harsh words and hurtful acts. Ironically, at the end of their journey from disillusionment, judgment, regret, resolve, apologies and forgiveness, there is great love and joy. In fact, the hard times and the upheaval in their relationship and its final resolution generated even greater feelings of love and happiness than before the problems began.

So too, Sukkot celebrates the joyous relief and ecstatic love that naturally follows the distance and alienation from G-d caused by our transgressions.

On Rosh Hashanah we experience G-d as a Judge. On Yom Kippur we experience G-d as a forgiving Parent. But on Sukkot we celebrate our experience of G-d as our Lover. According to Jewish mysticism the sukkah symbolizes G-d hugging us.

This article is excerpted from Inviting G-d In: The Soul Meaning for Jewish Holy Days.

Rabbi David Aaron is the Dean and Founder of Isralight and Yeshivat Orayta
Simchat Torah
Where’s the Joy?

Simchat Torah is not an easy day. I think there are few people who feel an innate rush of energy that propels them to dance endlessly with the Torah. It is for this reason that people stand at the side and talk, people resort to the Kiddush option; many people only truly participate in the dancing to give their kids an authentic Simchat Torah experience. But how many participants are rejoicing with the Torah, celebrating its completion, reveling in the beautiful synergy of Torah and the Jewish people?

I say this even in learned and committed communities. Somehow, it isn’t always easy to spontaneously generate genuine feelings of elation in regards to the Torah.

I was in shul on Simchat Torah and I approached a learned friend who was sitting there with his Gemara learning as the hakafot were going on. He looked up and said, “Lots of people are dancing with the Torah today, but is anyone studying Torah?” And I responded, “But maybe today is about the dancing and not the learning!” In other words, there is a time to understand Torah but there is also a time to rejoice in the special gift that G-d has given us.

This reminded me of an experience I had in London about 20 years ago. I visited a chassidish shtibel on Simchat Torah. At a certain point in the dancing, the Rebbe instructed everyone to put the Sifrei Torah down. Then he announced: “Everyone go to the bookshelf! Get a Gemara! Pick the tractate you are learning!” And everyone grabbed a Gemara and began to dance, holding their Gemaras above their heads, high in the air, dancing. The atmosphere was electrifying. The mood suddenly accelerated, the energy surged and somehow the Gemaras connected with the people in a deeper way than the Sefer Torah!

Why? Why should the moment in which the Gemara is held be more powerful than the Sefer Torah? After all, the Sefer Torah is the ultimate source of holiness. But maybe the Gemara has more power because we have studied it, grappled with its words and phrases. We have struggled with the Rishonim and Acharonim. We have forged a relationship; made a kinyan haTorah. The Sefer Torah itself is a symbol – so sacrosanct, so holy, that it is distant in a way. It is beyond relationship, beyond intimacy. It stands aloof; majestic, sacred. And yes, we chant its words, but how often do we receive an aliya in shul? How frequently do we engage with the material object that is a Sefer Torah?

Compare that to the book I learn every day: my Daf Yomi, my Chumash Rashi – that’s something I can dance with! It nourishes me on a daily basis: it provides the lifeblood of my Judaism, it challenges and excites, informs and inspires. It is my companion, my confidant, my chavruta.

I am not referring to the difference between Torah SheBe’al Peh (Oral Torah) and Torah SheBichtav (Written Torah) but rather to the development of emotional ties we forge with objects. The sentimental, emotional, and sometimes nostalgic feelings – maybe something we would even call love? – that can be evoked by a particular physical item.

So if this Simchat Torah we start dancing with our Gemaras, maybe we could dance with greater fervor! It is not that we have no simcha in our connection to Torah, but that the Sefer Torah itself fails to generate the elation!

As a community, we dance with the Torah because we have just completed it. This is a communal siyum. As for my studious friend, maybe I’ll suggest he dances with his Gemara this year!

Rabbi Alex Israel is an author, Tanach teacher and international lecturer.
On the 25th day of the first Adar in 1902, a group of Rabbis, led by Rav Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, founded the Mizrachi Movement. The motto of the movement was *Eretz Yisrael leAm Yisrael al pi Torat Yisrael*, “The Land of Israel for the Nation of Israel according to the Torah of Israel.” A triad of concepts – the Land of Israel, the Nation of Israel, the Torah of Israel.

Sukkot is the last of another triad, the *shalosh regalim*, the three annual holidays which necessitated a trip to Jerusalem; the first two being Pesach and Shavuot. It is not hard to find parallels between the two groups of three:

Pesach matches up with Am Yisrael. The first time that the Children of Israel turn into the Nation of Israel is in the story of the Exodus from Egypt as related in Exodus 5:1. Moshe and Aharon come to Pharaoh and say “Thus says the L-rd, the G-d of Israel: Let My people (*ami*, nation) go that they may celebrate a holiday for Me in the wilderness.” The same concept is repeated in Exodus 7:15-17 and 9:13.

The connection of Torat Yisrael with Shavuot is probably the most obvious – after all, another name for the holiday is *Zeman Matan Torateinu*, the time of the giving of the Torah. Customs of the holiday such as *tikkun leil Shavuot* commemorate this association.

That leaves Sukkot as the connection with the Land of Israel. This is logical as Sukkot is described in Exodus 23 as the festival of gathering, when one gathers the crop from the fields, from the Land of Israel.

However, the parallel is not so simple.

In Deuteronomy 27:9 it states, “Today you have become the nation of the L-rd your G-d.” This declaration could not be referring to the time of Exodus because it was stated much later. This verse is part of a speech given by Moshe after Israel has been wandering in the desert for 40 years, just prior to entering the Land. Furthermore, Israel was already called a nation 40 years earlier as we saw above.

On the surface, the most logical explanation is that the phrase “Today you have become the nation” is referring to the day Moshe is speaking, prior to entering Israel.

However, Rav Ovadia SeForno, the 16th-century commentator, sees it differently based on the context of the statement within the surrounding verses. In the preceding verse, G-d commanded Moshe and the Elders that when they cross over the Jordan to the Land of Israel, they should write the words of the Torah on large stones on Mount Eival, located near Shechem. The verses following the statement describe the commandment to perform a ceremony of the blessings and the curses on Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival respectively.

If this is true, we now have three times that Israel becomes a nation. First in Egypt. Second, at Mount Sinai, where G-d says to Israel that they will be an *Am Segula*, a special nation, and third when they enter the Land of Israel. With entering the Land, the intertwining of the triple cord of Nation, Land and Torah is even stronger. Three times in Deuteronomy (4:5,4:11, 6:1), Moshe stresses that the goal is to observe the commandments in Eretz Yisrael.

Thus, the Nation of Israel (first mentioned in the story celebrated by Pesach) received the Torah of Israel on Shavuot and this Torah is meant to be lived in the Land of Israel whose produce we give thanks for on Sukkot.

Let us hope that just as the triad of the holidays mentioned is celebrated each year, so should the triad of Nation, Torah and Land always be complete.

Dr. Deena Zimmerman is a pediatrician and Director of yoatzot.org, a website for women’s health and halacha
Over the past decade, the Matnat Chaim organization, founded and led by Rabbi Yeshayahu Heber, a kidney transplant recipient, has transformed Israel into the world leader in altruistic kidney transplants.

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You may be surprised to learn how small a role logic plays in some of our major life decisions.

I have alluded to the overriding effect of the subconscious mind on our emotions and on many of our choices.

The subconscious constitutes the lion’s share of our mind, and it does not obey the rules of logic.

Here is an example.

A woman complains bitterly about the abuse she has suffered during her marriage to an alcoholic husband.

After many fruitless efforts at trying to convince him to stop drinking, she ultimately divorces him. It is common knowledge that there is great likelihood that her choice in a second marriage is going to be an alcoholic!

Logic would tell us that under no circumstances would she choose a man who even so much as looks at an advertisement for a brand of beer, but the fact is that many women who divorce an alcoholic husband end up marrying another alcoholic.

Obviously, this choice cannot be on logical grounds and is motivated by the ideation and emotions residing in her subconscious.

When a couple divorces, their subconscious minds have retained many emotions, both positive and negative, that accrued during the years of marriage.

The interest of the second marriage is best served by as much detachment from the first marriage as possible. It has been appropriately quipped, “If you harbor resentment, you are allowing someone whom you do not like to live inside your head without paying rent.”

The point is that the person whom you resent does occupy space in your mind, and to the degree you retain the resentment, to that degree you have not detached from him/her.

Actually, you are allowing another person to control how you feel. The only way to detach from the object of resentment is to forgive.

If one’s former spouse behaved in a cruel or abusive way, one might legitimately claim that “He/she does not deserve to be forgiven.”

The point is, however, that if one does not forgive, one remains attached, even if only in a negative way, and any attachment to a former spouse constitutes an obstacle to an ideal relationship in a second marriage.

Don’t try to outsmart your subconscious mind. It can be baffling, and you have no way of knowing how it operates.

If your former spouse is going to have a presence in your mind, it may prevent the ideal cementing desirable in a new relationship. You might say, “I’m just going to put him/her out of my mind.”

That may work for your conscious mind, but not for the subconscious.

The only way to eliminate that negative factor is to forgive. Granted, it may take great effort to do so, but you will be doing so as a favor to yourself, not to your ex.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski is a psychiatrist and rabbi, and founder of the Gateway Rehabilitation Center in Pennsylvania.
A decade ago, I went with a close friend to Aspen, Colorado for two days, to recharge my batteries. On the first day, as we passed a moped rental establishment, I cajoled my reluctant friend into joining me, and we rented two mopeds. After 30 minutes of riding, I noticed a dirt path that snaked up a steep mountain. Once again I used my persuasive powers to get my friend to take it to the top with me, where we were rewarded for our efforts with breathtaking views.

On the way down, I simultaneously learned two lessons. First, riding up a mountain is far easier than riding down. And second, it is rather excruciating to have several dozen pebbles embedded in the palm of your hand.

In the emergency room, a doctor offered me several methods of treatment but strongly advised me to tackle the problem head-on and select the most painful option. This would involve peeling back the shredded skin, removing the larger pebbles with forceps and scraping the area with a brush to get rid of the tiny ones. With a wry smile, the doctor informed me, “Rabbi; no pain, no gain.”

That sage advice can be applied in addressing communal issues as well. For when we are faced with significant challenges, we can deal with them squarely, or we can choose to merely manage them in a superficial manner without subjecting ourselves to the pain that addressing them properly would entail.

When challenges are tackled directly and effectively, a temporary rise in the level of communal discomfort usually occurs. Many people understandably feel that the proposed solutions are far worse than the original problem they are purported to solve. But over time, a reduction in pain and a far healthier community invariably results.

For example, let’s say a girl becomes very ill as a result of anorexia. Parents of teenage girls in that community who suspect that their daughter is anorexic reach out for help. A percentage of the girls will actually have eating disorders – upping the numbers of reported kids with such conditions. (This does not mean that more girls came down with eating disorders, only that the awareness caused more of them to reach out for help.)

But then good things start happening. Schools bring in specialists to speak to the kids. Girls become more self-aware of their own eating habits. Peers eventually become informed enough that they can help their friends who are binging and purging. Eventually, eating disorder rates drop significantly, as the short-term publicity results in the long-term benefit of awareness and the creation of solution-oriented programs, that remain in place as the pain of the publicity subsides.

When abuse cases or drug arrests that are widely reported in the secular media are not discussed at all, or glanced over in our papers, we have the worst of all worlds. We are not really accomplishing our goal of shielding our community and teenagers, especially with exponentially growing digital communication. It is entirely possible to keep young children sheltered, but many or most of our teenagers hear about these incidents anyway from family members or their peers in school. So what we have are swirling bursts of information and misinformation which generate a growing sense of discomfort and cognitive dissonance among adults and children. All the while, the suppression of this information and the personal attacks on those who dare to discuss them means that far too little of the ‘good stuff’ – the things that could help prevent these issues from recurring, such as awareness or prevention programs – is happening.

Going back to my moped story, engaging in the airbrushing of distasteful news and not teaching the lessons learned from them is analogous to asking my doctor to leave the pebbles in place and painfully pull the skin over the stones to cover them. You know what the result would be – infection and far worse.

It is my fervent hope that moving forward we will usher in a new phase in our collective dialogue where we – excruciatingly but with steely determination – face our challenges head-on and seek to improve things for our children and grandchildren.

Rabbi Yakov Horowitz is an educator, author, and child safety advocate. He conducts parenting workshops in Jewish communities around the world.
The history of the Gush Etzion region dates as far back as the biblical Land of Israel. Gush Etzion has been a witness to the journeys of our forefathers, the visions of prophets and kings, and the battles of Bar Kochba. Early pioneers made brave attempts to settle the area during the last century. In the 1940s, four small communities were established only to be destroyed by the Jordanian Legion during the 1948 War of Independence. 19 years later, following the Six-Day War, the sons and daughters of the original pioneers returned and today the area is flourishing.

South Eastern Gush Etzion is just 12-minutes from Efrat. It’s comprised of five communities: Ma’ale Amos, Ibei HaNachal, Meitzad, Pnei Kedem and most recently the Arugot Farm.

Home to the 2,000-year-old Herodian, the area overlooks breathtaking views of the Dead Sea and the awe-inspiring cliffs of the Arugot Valley. In the heart of the biblical Wilderness of Zif, where King David composed many of the Psalms and hid from King Saul, the founders of Arugot Farm – in just four years – have transformed a barren wilderness into a Garden of Eden-like oasis, unlike anything in the Land of Israel.

Founded by four environmentally-conscious pioneering Israeli families who literally paved the roads to these previously inaccessible mountains, the Arugot Farm is becoming a sought-after destination for both Israelis and tourists seeking to experience Israel’s magnificent natural beauty. Here they encounter a renaissance of organic natural living and can walk through Judea’s rich history of Judea, from King David to the Maccabees, to Rabbi Akiva and Bar Kochba.

From afar, the farm looks like an ancient Judean kingdom, with a castle-like retreat center rising from the dust. Nearby stands a beautiful house of prayer. A short walk away one can find an ancient cave, untouched for millennia, three enchanting organic vineyards, over 5,000 blossoming fruit trees, an innovative ecological pool, and intoxicating views of the Dead Sea, Massada, Jerusalem and the Judean Desert.

The Arugot Farm is also home to the largest ecological pool in Israel. It is also a swimming pool, developed by Israeli scientists and marine biologists – who used technology combining several layers of rocks, water plants, and guppies, with a natural filtration system – to create a perfect ecosystem with constant flowing, ‘living’ water (Mayim Chaim) with no chemicals or chlorine. The pool overlooks the Judean Desert and offers an invigorating and unusual swimming experience.

An integral part of the farm experience is visiting the homes of the four founding families, actually meeting them and hearing their stories of how they settled these mountains – connecting their homes to the national grid, paving the roads and restoring Jewish life to ancient land. A visit to the Arugot Farm is a fun and inspiring educational experience for the whole family; a visit that will add an entirely new dimension to your connection to the Land of Israel.
In 1923, Rabbi Meir Shapiro introduced the idea of Daf Yomi – a daily study of a page of Talmud – and the first Siyum HaShas took place in 1931. Nearly 100 years later, hundreds of thousands of people around the world have taken part in the program.

For the first time ever, World Mizrachi and Mifalei HaTzionut HaDatit will be hosting the main Siyum in Jerusalem for the Dati Leumi community as we celebrate the completion of the 13th Daf Yomi cycle and immediately begin the next one.
W hen all the politicking is done and a new Israeli government eventually is formed, big diplomatic and defense decisions loom.

Israel must be ready for war on three fronts against an Iranian-led coalition. This means preventing the emergence of an Iranian war machine in Syria and long-range Iranian missile bases in Iraq; presenting a credible capacity to strike Iranian nuclear targets; developing the ability to withstand an intense missile war; and training ground troops capable of swift maneuvers and attaining decisive outcomes in the two Palestinian arenas.

Indeed, a new national security plan published (in English) in September by the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS) says that Israel must prepare for war.

This will test the cohesion of Israeli society. Therefore, say JISS fellows, the new government must nurture a spirit of unity and national purpose by building a policy consensus as broad as possible.

Building consensus means avoiding risky diplomatic escapades like unilateral withdrawals from parts of Judea and Samaria; withdrawals that would unnecessarily and unjustifiably tear the country apart while feeding unrealistic Palestinian expectations – without any real diplomatic reward for Israel.

“Indefinitely managing the conflict with the Palestinians is not a cowardly choice by hapless political and military leaders, but a rational choice,” write the JISS fellows. “Especially when the Iranian challenge looms larger than ever on Israel’s horizons."

To this I add: judicious conflict management requires a steady hand at the helm of state, and self-confidence in the justice of Israel’s long-term interests. Most of all, it requires patience.

As for the extension of Israeli law to settlements in Judea and Samaria, here too the JISS plan urges restraint. “No action should be taken until the expected Trump administration peace initiative has run its course. Even then, Israeli moves should adhere to the contours of broad national consensus” – meaning the settlement blocs, the Jordan Valley, and other key strategic areas.

The big exception to this rule is Jerusalem. Israel’s national security requires control over Jerusalem and its very broad environs. Reinforcing Jerusalem should be a high priority, with the government acting to bolster the Zionist majority in the city by massive building in the E-1 quadrant (despite Palestinian and European objections) and linking the city to Ma’ale Adumim and eventually to the Jordan Valley.

The plan also recommends that the predominantly Arab parts of the city be governed more firmly and fairly. This means that resolute action needs to be taken against radical elements undermining Israel’s administration of the Temple Mount, and against foreign elements (like Turkey and the EU) who undermine Israel’s sovereignty in the Jewish people’s historic capital. At the same time, Israel should encourage greater integration of Jerusalemite Arabs in Israeli life through investment in infrastructure and education.

JISS fellows hope that the Trump plan will upend stale “common wisdom” regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – the so-called Clinton Parameters for a “two-state solution” – and suggest more realistic contours. In any case, the IDF must be ready for a security deterioration if Palestinian leadership violently rejects the American initiative, as expected.

Other recommendations in the JISS national security plan are to prioritize relations with Egypt and Jordan while seeking new partnerships in the Arab world; exact a price for Erdogan’s provocations and bolster alliances in the eastern Mediterranean; preserve bipartisan support for Israel in the US; maintain active dialogue and deconfliction channels with Russia; act to develop European friendships to negate hostile attitudes in Brussels; tread carefully amidst rising tensions in Asia; and enhance Israel’s diplomatic toolbox by revitalizing the national security council and foreign ministry.

At a much darker hour in Jewish history, prior to the U.N. vote in 1947, David Ben-Gurion said: “We hold no illusions, but do not despair. For us Jews, and particularly Zionists, two things are forbidden: easy optimism and sterile pessimism.”

That dictum, “no illusions, no despair,” is the headline of the JISS national security plan. This reflects the belief that Israel’s strategic position is better than ever, and that the country can overcome all challenges if its leaders act wisely.

David Weinberg is vice president of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, jiss.org.il. His personal site is davidmweinberg.com

David M. Weinberg
WHICH OCCUPATION?

The call rings out from the editorial pages of leading newspapers, from pro-Palestinian non-governmental organizations, from progressive Jewish organizations, and from presidential candidates. 

Ask someone at random what Israel should do to resolve the longstanding Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the answer you’re most likely to get is “end the occupation.”

It sounds simple enough, but which occupation are they talking about?

For most Westerners, the answer is obvious: the occupation of the West Bank.

It’s not that simple however. Contrary to the Western view, for most Palestinians, the occupation is not limited to the West Bank but consists of “historic Palestine,” which includes the whole of Israel.

For most Palestinians, the occupation began in 1948 when Israel was born, and only continued in 1967 when Israel took over the West Bank.

Therefore, they won’t be satisfied with anything less than the elimination of the State of Israel.

There is a glaring discrepancy on this matter between our friends on the Upper West Side and our friends in Ramallah.

Don’t just take my word for it. Listen to the Palestinians themselves.

In a speech on Palestinian TV in October 2013, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas stated: “All Palestinian land is occupied – Gaza is occupied, the West Bank is occupied, the 1948 lands [i.e., Israel] are occupied and Jerusalem is occupied.”

A June 2019 survey of Palestinians conducted by the Palestine Center for Public Opinion confirms the Palestinian perception of the occupation. When asked about ending the conflict with Israel permanently, only 30% of West Bankers would approve a two-state solution.

The majority say, “The conflict should not end and resistance should continue until all of historic Palestine is liberated.”

In a stunning video, Palestinians were asked, “If Israel left the West Bank and Gaza, would there be peace with Israel?” At first, most answer in the affirmative – until it is clarified that that would mean Israel would still exist next to an independent Palestinian state. After this, respondents make it clear that by “ending the occupation” they were referring not only to the West Bank and Gaza but to Israel proper as well.

Indeed, the symbol of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement (BDS), which seeks to end the occupation, does not show a map of the West Bank, but a map of all of Israel, the “liberation” of which is the real goal of their campaign.

And there is no mistaking the meaning of the chant heard at virtually all pro-Palestinian rallies: “From the river to the sea, Palestine must be free.” The river is the Jordan River and the sea is the Mediterranean Sea. In other words, Palestine is Israel.

Further, the Palestinians memorialize the “Nakba” or “catastrophe” not to commemorate the 1967 Six-Day War but rather to mourn the 1948 War of Independence.

For a Palestinian, the real occupation began in 1948 with the creation of Israel, not in 1967. That is the occupation they seek to end to this day.

Regardless of what Westerners might think, Palestinians are of the view that the occupation includes all of Israel and will continue until not only the West Bank is in their hands, but also Tel Aviv, Haifa and Ramat Gan.

This is nothing new. Palestinians have been vowing to destroy Israel from day one, even before the 1967 occupation of the West Bank. Prior to the 1948 war, Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, made it clear that the Arabs did not intend merely to prevent the birth of the Jewish State, but “would continue fighting until the Zionists were annihilated.”

Prior to the 1967 war, Hafez al-Assad, then Syria’s Defense Minister, declared: “The time has come to enter into a battle of annihilation.”

The Palestinians have backed up these words with numerous wars and acts of terrorism.

Understanding the Palestinians’ view of the occupation helps explain their otherwise inexplicable rejection of numerous offers by Israel and the international community to create their own independent state living in peace side-by-side with Israel (1937, 1947, 1967, 2000, 2008).

At the end of the day, what matters is not how Western advocates for Palestinians spin the issue, but rather what Palestinians say and do. And they have made their desires abundantly clear in word and deed for over a century.

This article first appeared in a different form on the Jewish News Syndicate website.

Steve Frank is an attorney, retired after a 30-year career as an appellate lawyer with the United States Department of Justice in Washington D.C.
Eitan Hermon was born in 1974 and raised in Kfar Blum, a kibbutz in northern Israel. At age 10, he began running with his cousin as part of the kibbutz athletics program. As a teenager, he joined the Galil running group and would run about 7km per day.

After graduating from high school, he joined the IDF as a soldier in the famed Golani Brigade. He completed his military service with distinction and continued as a reservist.

Eitan returned to competitive racing, completing several 10K races in under 35 minutes. He routinely participated in marathons and made quite a name for himself. Until the Second Lebanon War.

In 2006, a roadside bomb exploded on Eitan’s tank. As he was being evacuated, lying on a stretcher, Eitan repeatedly shouted, “I will run a marathon again! I will run a marathon again!”

It didn’t look possible though. Over the course of that first year, Eitan’s doctors tried valiantly to save his right leg. His whole world was turned upside down. Finally, he agreed to an amputation just below his knee to alleviate the constant and enormous pain.

“I agreed because, in my mind, this was the only way I was going to get back to what I was before the accident. Running was something I had done my whole life. It was part of my identity. It gave me confidence and it gave me hope.”

And indeed, Eitan Hermon never lost the hope that one day he would run competitively again and even cross the finishing line as a winner.

And so he began a long journey back to the track. He was fitted with a special prosthetic leg for running and a year after amputation started training for national and international competitions.

After just four months, Eitan completed his first 10K. His coaches were amazed and he continued training at a high level.

The following year, he completed the Tiberias marathon (42K) in the astonishing time of 3:46 (three hours 46 minutes).

And in 2017, after 16 attempts, Eitan set a world record for single-leg amputee marathon runners.
He clocked a time of 2:56.53 in Vienna, Austria, beating the previous world record by almost a whole minute, just a few hours before the start of Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Memorial Day) in Israel. Yet with all his courage, determination and persistence, Eitan is not alone.

FROM LOSING A HAND TO BECOMING AN IRONMAN

In October 2012, in his role as a Givati Brigade company commander, Ziv Shilon was leading his last operational mission at the Gazan border, a combined operation to search for explosive devices and tunnels. Ziv’s final task was to open a border fence gate to allow Israeli tanks to return to Israeli territory.

As he was opening the gate, an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blew up in his face. He lost his left hand, suffered severe injuries to his other hand, and went through 14 surgeries and intensive rehabilitation during an arduous journey to recovery.

“My life changed in one second,” says Ziv. “After 11 months in hospital, I had to learn to do everything from the beginning – dressing myself, taking showers, driving my own car and writing again. It was not easy and there were lots of ups and downs.”

Nevertheless, with steadfast commitment and rock-hard willpower, Ziv conquered his immense physical and mental challenges. He even hired a long-distance running coach. He trained day and night until he achieved his goal of completing a marathon.

In 2015, Ziv completed the Berlin Marathon and two other marathons, and just this year he competed in the Arizona Ironman competition, consisting of a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bicycle ride and a 26.22-mile marathon, raced in that order. It is widely considered one of the most difficult one-day sporting events in the world.

Ziv and Eitan are just normal guys but in Israel, the extraordinary is common. Anywhere else they would be living legends.

And talking of living legends, look at Noam Gershony.

THE MIRACULOUS GOLD MEDAL

In July 2006, IAF (Israel Air Force) pilot Noam Gershony’s helicopter crashed into a second helicopter and fell to the ground during the Lebanon War. His co-pilot, Ran Kochbah, died on the spot.

Gershony suffered from various severely broken bones and was bleeding from every orifice on his face.

Doctors did not believe he would survive.

However, as Ben-Gurion famously said, “he who does not believe in miracles is not a realist,” and only six months later, after spending hours lying motionless in bed surrounded by his close family and friends, Noam Gershony was released from the hospital.

He was paralyzed. But alive.

Any normal person would have just hoped to recover as best he could and develop a routine to get on with life. But Noam Gershony comes from the Eitan Hermon and Ziv Shilon School of Grit. During his long and difficult recovery, Gershony decided to take up wheelchair tennis. He had had just five tennis lessons before his accident.

“I thought to myself, ‘Look Noam, you’re alive. At least do something with your life and enjoy it!’”

Four years after his accident, in December 2010, Gershony won first place in the Quad Singles at an international wheelchair tennis tournament in the Czech Republic. At the same tournament he also won the Quad Doubles with a French partner. After this event, he was ranked 29th in the world.

But he didn’t stop there.
In his Paralympic Games debut in the summer of 2012, Gershony defeated the top-ranked player in the final to win Israel’s first Paralympic gold medal since 2004.

The 29-year-old burst into tears as the Israeli national anthem, Hatikva, was played and the flag was hoisted high at the winners’ ceremony.

When asked how he felt, Noam replied, “I’m on top of the world.”

NOT JUST ANOTHER MARATHON

Once a year, adults and teenagers, from Israel and abroad, come together for a true Zionist experience – to run through the streets of Jerusalem and spend a weekend together with wounded IDF soldiers and victims of terror like Eitan, Ziv and Noam, who have rehabilitated their lives through sports.

It is a weekend during which one learns the true meaning of sacrifice, hope and willpower.

The Jerusalem Marathon isn’t merely another sports event. It is a voyage (or rather a run) through 3,000 years of history.

Jerusalem itself is a symbol of eternal hope, re-emerging from destruction and desolation again and again.

If you would like to meet Israeli heroes and enjoy the running experience of a lifetime, join the World Mizrachi, World Bnei Akiva and Tikvot’s ‘Run in Jerusalem’ team at the Jerusalem Marathon this March.

If they can do it, you certainly can!

This year’s Run in Jerusalem program will also be in memory of Nancy Morgenstern z”l marking 18 years since her passing in the 9/11 terror attack.
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Ibrahim Yassin was born 55 years ago in a Shi’ite village in eastern Lebanon. His family supported the western-oriented Lebanese government. But the Beirut government was very weak, and Palestinian terrorists ruled the area. They made sure to harass and punish the Shi’ites because of their political opinions.

In 1982, the Israeli Army entered Lebanon and life improved. Even before they arrived, Ibrahim admired Israel. He could see the hills of northern Israel and wished to go there. It seemed so peaceful. Not like Lebanon. Before the Israelis came, their lives were filled with terror. The Israelis made their lives better in so many ways. The Israeli Army restored order. Suddenly everyone had a job, money, a good life and peace.

One day in 1983, Ibrahim was away from home, grazing his cattle, when his wife Diba went into labor. With no midwife or hospital nearby, the Yassin family turned to the IDF forces for help.

Tzachi Bareket, an officer in IDF’s Intelligence Unit and a farmer
himself, led his men into the village to help, breaking several army regulations. He delivered the baby and arranged for mother and child to be taken to a hospital in Israel. Two days later, Ibrahim's brother, a soldier in the Israeli-backed South Lebanese Army, brought them home.

In 1985, Hezbollah actually tried to kill his entire family, so they fled to a town in southern Lebanon, which was under Israeli control. By day the men in the family would tend to business back in their village but at night they'd return to the safety of the south.

Ibrahim's family had good relations with IDF Intelligence. Anyone who wanted to live in peace accepted the Israeli presence gladly. As the Arabic saying goes: “If your neighbor is happy, you are happy too.”

Until one day Hezbollah kidnapped Ibrahim, his father and two of his brothers. They were locked in an underground bunker and held there for a whole year. They tortured him, cut him with knives, and burned his nine-month-old baby in front of his eyes.

After he was released, Ibrahim began actively assisting the Israelis, passing on information about the activities of the PLO and other local Palestinian organizations.

Over time, Ibrahim bonded with the Israeli soldiers. They were good to his family and he wanted to return the favor. If Ibrahim saw terrorist activity, he would tell the soldiers. In the eyes of the terrorists, he was a traitor and a spy. But Ibrahim wanted to have a normal life and the terrorists' activities were making his life difficult.

After the Palestinians control was loosened, Ibrahim's Israeli handlers tried to convince him to join Hezbollah. He didn't want to at first. It was frightening. But his handlers pressured him.

It was the period in Lebanon when everyone was fighting everyone else. The Shi'ite Amal organization was Hezbollah’s big adversary in the battle for control of the Shi'ites. Ibrahim began passing information to Hezbollah about Amal. Hezbollah saw that they could depend on him and he began to rise through the ranks.

When Ibrahim heard about a terrorist on his way to the Israeli border to carry out a suicide car bombing, he called his handler directly and reported it. Israel sent a helicopter to blow up the car.

Ibrahim gave Israel regular and accurate reports of the movements of Hezbollah officers. As a result of his information, Israel was able to target some of its most dangerous foes.

There is no real job security in being a double agent, and indeed, in 1997, the Hezbollah became suspicious. Ibrahim had to be extra careful.

One day, a relative came and told him that the Syrians had been monitoring his conversations and meeting places with the Israelis.

Without a thought, Ibrahim ran to the Hezbollah became suspicious. Ibrahim had to be extra careful.

He continued to assist the IDF for three more years. Knowing that his family was safe in Israel encouraged him to serve even more. He worked with all the security forces and proved to be an excellent resource, because he knew the area and the people inside out.

On Erev Yom Kippur, in 2000, Ibrahim was sitting with his wife on the porch, watching their Jewish neighbors walking to shul. Ibrahim turned to his wife and said: “A mosque is G-d’s house and a synagogue is also G-d’s house. I want to go there.”

He asked a neighbor if he would be welcome and the neighbor said yes. The Rabbi of the shul didn't recognize him of course and handed him a kippa, assuming he was a non-religious Jew.

The day after Yom Kippur, Ibrahim went back to work and told his co-worker about going to shul on Yom Kippur. His colleague laughed. “What were you doing there?” Despite the jokes, Ibrahim started to go more often. Something was attracting him to Judaism.

A senior officer introduced him to the Chief Rabbi of Tzfat, Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu, and Ibrahim Yassin began the conversion process. Today, Ibrahim is known as Avraham Sinai.

Avraham's wife converted with him and to the unknowing onlooker they are a regular religious family. The Sinai children cannot even converse in Arabic. Avraham now lives off a pension from the IDF and gives lectures about his life as a Hezbollah spy working for Israeli Intelligence. He's quite a character, full of contradictions. He is both very outgoing and at the same time enjoys wandering in the forests for solitude and prayer. And at the time of writing he was building beehives and a goat and chicken farm!

Today Avraham is a pillar of Tzfat’s ultra-Orthodox community and his espionage escapades seems light years away. Perhaps only the pita bread and labneh hint at a former life under the dark and dangerous shadows of the Israel-Hezbollah war.

1 A soft cheese, similar in texture to cream cheese, made from strained yogurt and popular in Middle Eastern cuisine.
ISRAELI INNOVATIONS

NAME OF COMPANY
BIOFEED ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY CROP PROTECTION LTD

FOUNDER AND CEO
DR. NIMROD ISRAELEY
A crop protection specialist, a Ph.D. in entomology, an expert in fruit fly meta-population ecology, a researcher, a scientists, an innovator, a visionary, a businessman and a true gGlobal leader of the green revolution.

STAGE
Growth stage, expansion into global markets and initiation of National Projects in Africa.

CATEGORY
Agriculture.

MARKET AIM
The Fruit Fly control market is estimated at 4B USD.

ABOUT THE COMPANY
Biofeed is leading a global green revolution in crop protection. The company developed a game-changing technology, the GCFR, for the ultra-slow-release of smells under various climatic conditions. This innovative technology enables a spray-free scent-based control of flying pests. Focusing on Fruit Fly control, Biofeed’s FreeDome solution is the first and only product to effectively control the Fruit Fly species of Asia and Africa. Including the most devastating invading pest, the Oriental Fruit Fly (Bactorcera dorsalis) responsible today for 30-50% crop loss across Africa and Asia. FreeDome farmers using the solution report 50-100% increase in marketable produce within a single season, reduced post-harvest damage and insecticide residue to negligible levels, and high-quality export-grade premium produce.

PITCH
Green Valley is a Pan-African project, initiated by Biofeed in collaborations with the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. The project is set to help African countries boost their fruit exports, and is most relevant to dozens of countries whose exports are limited or even banned because of fruit fly infestations.

The project includes a comprehensive end-to-end solution, offered as a National Project, to enhance fruit productivity and enable high-volume export.

WHAT NEED IS GREEN VALLEY COMING TO FILL?
Until now, Asia and Africa have suffered 30%-50% crop loss and were therefore banned from the global fruit export market. There is a need to effectively control Fruit Fly, and enable farmers to increase both quantities and quality of produce. On the consumer end, consumers would like to see an increase of insecticide-free and infestation-free Agri-produce on the market, and having the produce labeled as such.

WHAT DOES GREEN VALLEY DO TO FILL THIS NEED?
The projects combine the best Israeli farmers, and the leading Israeli Ag-technology, and is offered as a National Project. It includes effective green crop protection, high-yield farms, and high-volume export facilities. A national centralized export authority will standardize and enforce strict high-quality control, to ensure high-quality export of premium fruit, labeled as infestation and insecticides residues free. The project also includes capacity building packages to rural farmers, center-of-excellence for training, and export-grade cultivation protocols extended to farmers who can become exporters. Countries participating the Green Valley project, and farmers meeting the standard, can enjoy access to the global high-end fruit trading market.

FOR FINANCIAL DOCUMENTS AND MORE INFORMATION:
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START-UP NATION

ISRAELI INNOVATIONS

NAME OF COMPANY
BABY COMPRIMI

CO-FOUNDER AND CEO
BATSHI TSIMBLER
operates a private clinic in Alternative Medicine, involved in the field of Shiatsu and Chinese physiotherapy for more than 15 years.

STAGE
Development and production of prototype as well as initial line testing.

CATEGORY
Baby, Medical.

MARKET AIM
$500 million.

ABOUT THE COMPANY
Baby Comprimi’s vision is to relieve colic and stomach pain in newborn babies and to enable their parents to get a good night’s sleep.

PITCH
9.2 million babies are born in the US, Israel and Europe each year. Baby Comprimi is a revolutionary product to help ease gas discomfort in babies in a completely external manner.

WHAT NEED IS BABY COMPRIMI COMING TO FILL?
In the first few months of a baby’s life, the digestive system develops. This leads to gas and pain for the infants and a lack of sleep for the new parents. There are currently no products for external use or ready-to-use compresses on the market. The most common remedies for colic in babies are oral drops that can be purchased in pharmacies over-the-counter. There are also natural products and remedies manufactured by pharmaceutical companies however, natural products and food additives like chamomile tea, fennel tea, and plant extracts containing active ingredients such as sugar or alcohol are not suitable for newborn infants.

WHAT DOES BABY COMPRIMI DO TO THIS NEED?
“Grandma’s remedy” has been used to solve the problem for generations, but it is not well-known or widely used because it entails extensive and complicated advance preparation. Baby Comprimi™ is a compress made of natural materials that relieves the accumulation of gasses in a baby’s digestive system. It is a ready-to-use shelf product that can be applied immediately at any given moment. Baby Comprimi has been patented in both Israel and the US.

FOR FINANCIAL DOCUMENTS AND MORE INFORMATION:
baromanag@gmail.com

Have a Start-Up? To be featured in this section, email production@mizrachi.org
Celebrating THE CONCLUSION OF THE TORAH

When the Beit Mikdash was standing, the Jewish people were commanded to bring terumot and ma’asrot (tithes and other contributions).

In terms of calculating the years in which particular contributions were given, a seven-year period was divided into two cycles.

In the first and second years, the people would bring ma’aser rishon (for the Levites) and ma’aser sheini (which is a mitzvah to eat in Jerusalem), and in the third year, ma’aser rishon and ma’aser ani (for the poor), which replaced ma’aser sheini.

This arrangement would repeat itself over the next three years, i.e. years four and five would be identical to years one and two, with the sixth year being the same as the third year.

The seventh year was defined as a Shmita year, in which the Land was left unworked. The cycle began again the year after.

Similarly, the Jewish custom is to read the Torah in public every Shabbat. According to the Babylonian custom (which we follow), we complete the entire Torah in one year’s reading cycle. However, the custom in ancient Israel was to spread the reading over a three-year period (Megillah 29b).

It is interesting that the conclusion of the Torah reading occurred twice in seven years, with the second completion designed to coincide with the mitzvah of Hakhel, an event that has similar status to the Revelation at Mount Sinai.

Rav Gigi notes that the separation of terumot and ma’asrot is arranged in two cycles of three years, which is similar to the completion of the Torah once every three years. This symbolizes the two types of food that are Divinely measured for Am Yisrael – physical food and spiritual sustenance.

The completion of the Torah highlights our spiritual relationship with G-d and the agricultural cycle of terumot and ma’asrot indicates our physical relationship with the Land.

“Man will not live on bread alone, but man will live by what emanates from the mouth of G-d” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Rav Gigi makes the comparison between the blessings we make over learning Torah and the blessings we make after a meal. The majority of commentators consider both as mitzvot ordained by the Torah. The implication is that just as one cannot live without food, so a Jew cannot live without Torah.

The Mizrachi Movement – which I have the honor and responsibility of representing in Israel’s National Institutions – combines these two ideas – instilling Torah values into the physical world.

On Simchat Torah, we look ahead to the New Year bursting with the spiritual food we have ‘eaten’ over the last month. We march forward with the understanding that Am Yisrael without Torah are like humans without food. May our connection to ‘Torah and to Israel give us much sustenance, strength and faith for the sweet year ahead.

1 Based on an article by Rabbi Baruch Gigi, Rosh Yeshivat Har Etzion, in “Sukkot” (Miriam edition).

2 See Midrash HaGadol.

Gael Grunewald is Head of the Rural Growth and Development Division of the WZO, former Director of World Bnei Akiva and one of World Mizrachi’s representatives in the National Institutions.
Rabbi Samuel Mohliver was among the founders and leaders of the Chibbat Zion movement and served as the force behind the religious faction within the movement. His lifework planted the seeds which would later germinate into the Mizrachi Movement under Rabbi Ya’akov Reines.

Rav Mohliver was born in 1824 in a village near Vilna, the intellectual center of Lithuanian Jews. He was such a brilliant Talmudist that he was ordained as a Rabbi at the age of 18. At first, he refused to take a rabbinic position and became a flax merchant for five years. Business problems and the death of his well-to-do in-laws forced him to accept the office of Rabbi in his home village. A period of six years there was followed by successive calls to ever-larger communities. In the 1870s, when he first displayed signs of an active interest in work for the Holy Land, Mohliver was the Rabbi of Radom in Poland. Already notable not only as a scholar but as a communal leader, he was elected to a much larger post, in Bialystok, which he occupied for 15 years, until his death in 1898.

It was the pogroms of 1881 that spurred Rav Mohliver into practical Zionist action. Tens of thousands of Jews had fled across the Russian border to Galicia, in the Austrian-held part of Poland. Mohliver attended a conference of western Jewish leaders that was called on the spot, in Lemberg (the capital of Galicia), to decide what to do with these refugees. He suggested that they be sent to Palestine. On this journey, Mohliver also visited Warsaw, where he was instrumental in organizing the first formal section of the then-nascent Chibbat Zion. He convinced two of his most distinguished rabbinic colleagues to join him in issuing a call for emigration to Palestine, but they soon stepped away from such activities and Chibbat Zion was dominated by secularists like Leo Pinsker. Rav Mohliver remained one of the few Rabbis active within it.

His decision to remain, side by side with avowed agnostics, was the crucial turning point in the history of religious Zionism, for it determined not only its future as an organized political party, but also the nature of the problems it would have to face. On the one hand, Mohliver, like his successors today, had to do battle with the ultra-Orthodox. It was no small matter for him to announce that all Israel was in peril and hence “would we not receive anyone gladly and with love, who though irreligious in our eyes, came to rescue us?” Even over 100 years later, though this fight is now largely won, there are still those among the Orthodox who do not accept the notion of a Jewish national loyalty we should all share, over and above religious differences.

On the other hand, Mohliver inevitably exercised constant pressure — and here, too, he has been followed by his successors — on the national movement to be more responsive, at least in practice, to the demands of Halacha. This note is sounded in what was in effect his testament, his message to the First Zionist Congress which he sent through his grandson. Earlier, in 1893, a long series of differences between him and the main Chibbat Zion management in Odessa, which was largely secularist, had led to a decision to create another branch of the Movement, headed by Rav Mohliver, to work among Orthodox Jews. This was given the Hebrew name Mizrachi (an abbreviation for merkaz ruchani, or spiritual center). When the Zionist Organization was re-founded in 1901 by Rabbi Ya’akov Reines and other disciples of Rav Mohliver, they upheld the name, the spirit and the values of the original Mizrachi.

It is important to note that Rav Mohliver was also active on behalf of settling the land in then Palestine. His single greatest service in this area came early, in 1882, when he went to Paris to meet the young Baron Edmond de Rothschild. Mohliver convinced him to take an interest in the struggling settlers in the Holy Land and Rothschild became the greatest single benefactor of the Zionist efforts at that time.
The Voice of the Willow

Hoshanah Rabbah has a unique status because it is the only day that links the Yamim Noraim – the days of judgment at the start of the year – with the Three Foot Festivals, as represented by Sukkot.

It is the time we are judged for water (i.e. how much rain there will be in the coming year) and thus – although it is part of Sukkot – it is intrinsically connected to the days of judgment. This link is even more obvious through the custom of beating the willow branches, which combines both the judgment and the Arba’a Minim taken on Sukkot.

In Midrashei Chazal, the most familiar trait of the willow, when it is bound with the other species, is emptiness, since it lacks both taste and smell. However, in examining the significance of Hoshanah Rabbah, we find that the opposite is true. Great importance is assigned to the willow, which is even expressed in the various names of this day: the seventh day of the willow, the day of the willow, the day the willows are beaten, etc.

Why is it so significant?

The Mishna (Sotah 4) describes the events on this day:

“How is the mitzvah of arava [performed]? There was a place below Jerusalem called Motza. They went down there and gathered tall aravot branches. They then came and leaned them up against the sides of the altar so that their tops drooped over the top of the altar. They sounded a tekiah and a terua and again a tekiah. Every day they [the priests] would go around the altar once and they would say: [Please G-d bring salvation now, Please G-d bring success now.] Rabbi Yehudah says, “[They would say:] Ani Vaho, Ani Vaho, Ani Vaho, Ani Vaho, Ani Vaho, Ani Vaho bring salvation now]. But on that [seventh] day they would go around the altar seven times. And when they would leave, what did they say? O altar this beauty is yours! O altar this beauty is yours! Rabbi Eliezer says: To G-d and to you, the altar. To G-d and to you, the altar!”

The great significance of this custom is that we still walk around the bima today as they went around the altar in Temple times – ר Eğer סדר היכל – a commemoration of the Temple. Similar to the mitzvah of eating maror and eating matzah and maror together on Seder Night, רнный סדר היכל.

The Mishna is describing the custom, throughout Sukkot, to walk around the altar with the Arba’a Minim once, but on the seventh day, Hoshanah Rabbah, they used to circle it seven times, with the long willow branches at its sides. It is important to note that the hakafot around the mizbayach – the site of Am Yisrael’s atonement – are not just an expression of joy, but also of appeasement and a request for water. The request of a people from its G-d to make the rain fall in its proper season.

The Gemara (Sukkah 43b-44b) discusses the origin of the custom: “…Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi differ. One holds that the rite of the willow branch is an enactment of the prophets, the other holds that the willow branch is a custom of the prophets.

And Rashi tells us who these prophets are: Chaggai, Zechariah and Malachi, the prophets of the Second Temple to whom tradition ascribes many enactments in the Grand Assembly.

The Rambam summarizes by saying that the source of bringing the willow to the Mikdash, in addition to the Arba’a Minim, is Halacha LeMoshe MiSinai, and it was also done on Shabbat, to publicize that it was a mitzvah. This tradition follows other prophet-initiated enactments – such as the Torah reading on Mondays and Thursdays – the common aim of which was to spread Torah across all sectors of the people.

So we are fortunate in our times too, on this special day, as we complete the prayers and pick up the aravot to beat, רнный סדר היכל, to enact a custom initiated by the prophets, and to connect to and continue an ancient tradition.

We saw at the outset that the arava is actually the most significant of the Four Species – linking the days of judgment to the other holidays, bridging the gap between moments of joy and moments of trepidation over the verdict of the water, between past and present, and between the service in the Temple – the prerogative of a selected few – and the current popular holiday celebrated joyfully all over the world.

Dr. Tova Ganzel is the Director of the Midrasha (Women’s Institute of Advanced Torah Study) in Bar-Ilan University.
This Year, Give Your Parents the Precious Gift of Peace of Mind… and Your Children the Priceless Gift of Meaning

Most of us lead ordinary lives and yet, each and every family has a story to tell that is uniquely their own.

Having a book compiled for the benefit of my children and grandchildren and future generations was indeed the right decision, and I would encourage others to do the same before all is forgotten.

Working with Danny Verbov was a great source of joy and at the same time fun. His sensitivity and humor enhanced our working relationship and most importantly resulted in a book that I am truly proud of.

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To discuss your ideas and wishes for a book to immortalize your loved ones and leave a meaningful legacy for your family, please contact Danny Verbov at dannyverbov@gmail.com or call +972-523115682.
L
egendary guitarist Frank Zappa not only had a golden hand but also a sharp tongue. When asked if the jazz era was over, Zappa replied: “Jazz is not dead, it just smells funny.” Zappa had radical political and social views, which he summed up with: “If you end up with a boring miserable life because you listened to your mom, your dad, your teacher, your priest, or some guy on television... you deserve it.”

Our society is probably the first in the history of humanity whose ultimate goal is the personal happiness of every human being. Almost all the processes that shape our society follow this route. For example, the endless discussions about mental health and mood, which was rare in earlier times, or sexual liberation. Even the difficulty of Generation Y to maintain stability in school and at work is related to the pursuit of personal happiness. As Zappa concluded, those who live a conservative, conformist life are doomed to misery.

Yet with all this pursuit of happiness, happiness is still elusive. A psychologist friend recently informed me that the plague of the 21st century is depression. The World Health Organization reported an 18 percent increase in worldwide depression rates from 2005 to 2015. If measured since 1990, this is a 50 percent increase. In young people, the deterioration is even worse. A new study has found that the depression rate among American youth has risen by more than 60 percent between 2009-2017. During this period, the rate of juvenile suicide attempts also soared. In Israel, the Ministry of Health has confirmed a steep rise in the need for antidepressants.

In this crazed pursuit of happiness, we may have pushed aside everything that seemed like an obstacle. Yet the surprising results of numerous recent studies – trying to discover the keys to happiness – show that the things that really make us happy are precisely the things that western society has been rejecting along the way. For example, fewer couples are getting married today, even in Israel, and more and more couples are choosing not to give birth (this nonsense has not yet reached us in Israel, thank G-d). But studies consistently show that married people are actually happier than their single counterparts, and parents of children are happier than adults who don’t have children (even though that’s hard to accept when you get up at 2am to a crying toddler and step on a Lego brick).

Another value thrust aside is religion. Despite the studies that show that religious people are happier than secular people. A study by Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics revealed that the ultra-Orthodox are the happiest group in the country. They are also the most satisfied with their financial situation, although they are the poorest sector. Chazal were correct: the truly rich man is the one who is happy with what he has.

Of course no-one has a bullet-proof prescription for happiness or for preventing suicide. And I certainly am not implying that it is worthwhile being religious only in order to be happy. Rav Soloveitchik despised utilitarian reasons for worshipping G-d. I keep Torah and commandments not because it is rewarding, but because I believe it to be the truth. But it’s still worth remembering when the next naysayer claims that religious life destroys our happiness.

So what else brings happiness? Among others: family, community, faith, meaning. Contemporary myth often portrays traditional life, within a strong framework of family and community, as a life of oppression and conformism. The opposite is true. People are usually happier when they are part of a strong social setting and not a society that is falling apart. Researcher David Newman of California reviewed a series of studies, conducted over 35 years, and examined a total of 25,000 people from 16 countries. He concluded that conservatives are clearly happier than liberals.

It’s hard to grasp happiness. It’s elusive when we try to attain in our lives and it’s elusive when researchers try to define it. Just remember two simple facts: we are living in a wide-scale social experiment whose purpose was to attain happiness for all. And that experiment failed.
Sukkot is multifaceted, and its halakhot are not all associated with only one central theme; rather, there are several themes that differ from those of all other holidays. In addition to the general mitzvot of a holiday detailed in Tractate Beitzah, and the mitzvot of the three pilgrim festivals, detailed in Tractate Hagiga, the holiday of Sukkot is characterized by its distinctive mitzvot: sukkah, which entails moving one’s residence and dining area; the special ceremony that involves taking the Arba’a Minim (the Four Species); the plethora of additional offerings unique to Sukkot, and the mitzvot and special ceremonies performed in the Temple.

In essence, Sukkot does not commemorate a specific historical event; rather, it commemorates the entirety of the Children of Israel’s experience in the desert – the life of a people without a country, without claim to land, and without stability. This commemoration includes gratitude for all the miracles of the Exodus, the clouds of glory, and the contrast between the life of a people wandering in the wilderness and the conclusion of the harvest in Eretz Yisrael. The Four Species too serve as a kind of victory procession, celebrating past accomplishments (Vayikra Rabbah 30); and include saying a prayer for rainfall and a successful crop in the coming year, the very essence of the mitzvah.

Although the thanksgiving and requests voiced during Sukkot are intimately connected to the Jewish people. In that sense, Sukkot becomes a holiday for the entire world, as an expression of both thanksgiving and entreaty.

The Torah verses that address Sukkot also have conspicuous elements of thanksgiving and rejoicing. Beyond the rejoicing that characterizes all the holidays, there is a special mitzvah of rejoicing on Sukkot, to the extent that the name of the holiday coined by the Sages in the prayers is: Zman Simhateinu (the time of our rejoicing). As an extension of the thanksgiving and rejoicing, there are special mitzvot, which include mention of and prayer for rain and blessing for the coming year.

Although the primary mitzvot of Sukkot were elucidated at length in the Torah, most of the discussion in Tractate Sukka is based on halakha transmitted to Moses from Sinai and on tradition. This is primarily due to the need to translate the verses into a structured system of halakhot with clearly demarcated limitations. While in many tractates most of the discussion is dedicated to clarifying the details of the mitzvot or to analyzing the myriad possibilities and intermediate cases, in Tractate Sukka, the central problems relate to definition of terms.

The five chapters in Tractate Sukka each deal with a well-defined topic: (1) defining the concept of sukkah in terms of its structure and dimensions, (2) determining the parameters and obligations of residing in the sukkah, (3) the essence and measures of the Four Species and how the mitzvah is fulfilled, (4) determining the relationship between the mitzvot of the holiday performed in the Temple and those performed outside the Temple, and (5) discussing the celebration of Sukkot in the Temple, the mitzvah of, and the special offerings sacrificed on Sukkot.

Tractate Sukka of The Noé Edition Koren Talmud Bavli, with its clear translation, digitized Daf Vilna, and fascinating commentary by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz, will enhance the meaning of Sukkot for new Talmud students and advanced learners alike.

Adapted from the Introduction to Tractate Sukka of The Noé Edition Koren Talmud Bavli.

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THE ESSENCE OF SUKKOT IN THE TALMUD

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RECOMMENDED READING

THE ESSENCE OF SUKKOT IN THE TALMUD

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In Sefer Devarim, the Torah describes the mitzvah of sukkah as follows: “The holiday of Sukkot you shall make for... seven days, as you gather from your threshing floor and your wine-press” (16:13). Chazal understood that the holiday you make refers to the sukkah you build and that which you gather to make it is not the grain or the wine, but the leftover vines, chaff, etc. that remain where the produce was removed (Sukkah 12a). In fact, this description defines what can and cannot be used for sechach, as we will discuss later. What is the point of stressing the use of the leftovers of the harvest for the mitzvah of sukkah?

One could simply say that the Torah is interested in ecological conservation. Instead of cutting down trees to make fancy sechach, we use what is available and would otherwise be discarded. Without rejecting this possibility, we can suggest a more spiritual variation of this theme.

A basic explanation of the idea behind living in a sukkah is that it shows our belief that the strong, permanent houses we build are not what afford us protection. Rather G-d can protect us in a flimsy dwelling, just as He protected our forefathers in the desert. The “harvest festival” element of Sukkot (see Shemot 23:16) conveys a theme of thanks for present-day bounty, and the choice of sechach may broaden the scope of the thanks. We recognize the good not only of the principal produce, but we demonstrate that we can use even the by-products of that which we grow with G-d’s help. We should be thankful for even the minor things that are apt to be overlooked. In addition to showing our thanks for agricultural leftovers, we also demonstrate that every little thing can be used for a mitzvah. We can use all of our physical resources for worthwhile matters. By means of extension, we can use all of our personal traits for a mitzvah or for our Avodat Hashem in general.

If we take this approach, we can continue with a homiletic analysis of not only what can be used for sechach but also that which can’t. Sechach cannot be still connected to the ground. From a practical perspective, that which is connected is probably intended to continue growing and producing. It would be wasteful to cut such a thing down and use it just for seven days. From a spiritual perspective, we may have attributes or attainments that we could use now but are better utilized if we allow them to develop more and “harvest” them later. For example, when it comes to both secular and sacred studies, there are times that one pursues advanced degrees instead of hurrying to the workplace to apply what was learned on a lower academic level. Furthermore, things that can become tameh (impure) are unfit. This consists mainly of things that are already processed or ready for use. In our sukkah, we want that which has not been defined for a given purpose but is open for exploration as to its appropriate use. Indeed, the sukkah teaches us to keep our minds open to the creative utilization of unknown or under-appreciated, physical and/or spiritual resources.

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**USHPIZIN / ATZERET**

**USHPIZIN**

Based on a passage in the Zohar, it is customary for people to welcome in Biblical guests known as ushpizin (אֻשְׁפִּיזים) into their sukkah. The root אֻשְׁפִּז (ushpiz) has a number of meanings in Talmudic Hebrew: an innkeeper or host (Sotah 37a, Zevachim 18b). Klein writes that אֻשְׁפִּיז means “a lodging place, an inn” (Megillah 26a, Yoma 12a) and is innkeeper or host (Sotah 37a, Zevachim 18b). Klein writes that the meaning of “guest” only began in medieval Hebrew. In modern Hebrew, the verb אֻשְׁפִּז means “to accommodate” or perhaps more commonly “to hospitalize.”

What is the origin of the word? Klein writes:

Med. Gk. hospition, hospetion (=inn), from L. hospitium (=inn; hospitality), from hostes, gen. hospitis (=host; guest), which stands for “hosti-potis and originally meant ‘lord of strangers.’

Rav Steinsaltz says it comes from the Persian asfanj or aspanj, also having the meanings of “inn” and “innkeeper.” Perhaps both the Latin and Greek words share a common earlier origin.

This root, particularly in its development in Latin (and from there to English and other languages) has a number of interesting phenomena associated with it. First, this is one of the words that went from Latin to Greek, instead of the other way around.

Also interesting is the number of seeming opposites that derive from this root. For example, both the English “host” and “guest” have their origins here. Even more striking, there are words with a positive connotation – hospitable, hospice and hotel, but also negative ones – hostile, hostage and host (as in an army). This was due to tension regarding guests: on the one hand they were to be treated kindly but on the other, they were strangers to be viewed with suspicion.

Judaism has a very positive attitude toward guests (e.g. the הקראת אירוח and the minhag of ushpizin), and we are commanded to love the ger. We are instructed to be hospitable, not hostile, to them.

**ATZERET**

After Sukkot comes שמיני עצרת Shemini Atzeret. We find the term first in Numbers 29:35: “On the eighth day, you will have an atzeret.”

Similarly we find it mentioned in Leviticus 23:36: “On the eighth day you shall observe a sacred occasion ... it is an atzeret; you shall not work at your occupations.”

The last day of Pesach is called atzeret in Deuteronomy 16:8: “On the seventh day, an atzeret.”

Additionally, in Rabbinic Hebrew, the holiday of Shavuot is known as Atzeret.

What is atzeret? There are several opinions:

1. **Assembly, gathering:** In Isaiah 1:13, we find the word azzara (אֵזוֹר) which has this meaning. Onkelos translates the word as כְּנִישׁה – gathering, which is related to the word הב כְּנִישׁה – Beit HaKnesset, literally “house of gathering.”

2. **Stoppage of work:** The Gemara gives this explanation in Chagiga 9a and 18a: צוּרָה – צוּר נפשוּת: מלכאנך “atzeret – stop doing work.” This is the opinion of Ibn Ezra and Sforno.

3. **Delay:** This is Rashi’s explanation, based on the Midrash in which G-d asks us to stay with Him just one day more. Radak in Sefer HaShorashim takes a similar approach and says that those that went up to Jerusalem for Sukkot were delayed there for one more day. Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman writes that while the previous meanings are found in other books of the Bible, in the Torah הקרא only means “to delay, to restrain.” The modern Hebrew verb שלך – “to arrest, to detain” is related to this meaning.

4. **Conclusion:** This is how the Septuagint translates the word into Greek: exodon, meaning “finale” (and related to the word “exodus.”) Bula in Da’at Mikra Yavikra says this meaning applies well to the last day of Pesach and Shavuot, which concludes the period of the Omer.

The different meanings of atzeret can help us understand a difference in the text of the Yatlelh VeYavo prayer. When mentioning Shemini Atzeret, Nusach Ashkenaz says: בְּיוֹם שְׁמִינִי עֲצֶרֶת, while Nusach Sefard has: בָּזֹאן שְׁמִינִי עֲצֶרֶת. The Nusach Ashkenaz version refers to the chag of atzeret, a holiday on its own, which fits with the definitions of “assembly” or “stoppage of work.”

The Nusach Sefard version has “the atzeret of the chag,” where chag refers to Sukkot. Therefore, the atzeret mentioned would be either the conclusion of Sukkot or one additional day’s delay after the seven days of Sukkot.

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We spend a lot of time and effort in constructing our sukka. It’s exciting to walk through the streets and witness so many sukkot being built. But as much effort as we put into setting up the sukkah, we seem to be eager to put in even more work into beautifying the sukkah.

The concept of noi mitzvah (beautifying a mitzvah) plays a role in this holiday not only with regard to the sukkah, but with regard to the Four Species as well. The concept of obtaining a beautiful etrog expresses more than the general rule of zeh keli v'anveihu, this is my G-d and I will beautify Him (Exodus 15:2). The latter applies to all objects of mitzvah.

We also have the Biblical requirement of peri etz hadar, the fruit of a citron tree (Leviticus 23:40). I have seen people spend hundreds of dollars on a beautiful etrog. Rashi explains that a dry lulav is unacceptable because it does not fulfill zeh keli v'anveihu, teaching us that the requirement of noi can, at times, be halachically indispensable.

The concept of noi mitzvah represents three different ideas which touch on our relationship to G-d and our service to Him:

**Appreciating the Beauty of G-d’s World**

In Psalms, David declares: “How abundant are Your works.”

We must appreciate G-d’s universe. He created a beautiful world for us, and we must behold that beauty. What if G-d had created His world in black and white? We all know that there is nothing more beautiful to the human eye than the natural colors of G-d’s world. Wherever we turn, we behold the beauty of G-d’s world. Beauty generates appreciation and love for G-d, which in turn, creates an intense feeling of simcha (joy). As the Rambam points out at the end of Hilchot Lulav, simcha is an integral part of our Avodat Hashem (service of G-d), and without it, our mitzvot are dry and cold.

We should see this holiday as a model that sets the tone for our mitzvot throughout the entire year. We should always appreciate G-d’s creations, and, in turn, utilize our ability to imitate natural beauty, adding noi to all aspects of our Avodat Hashem.

**Individuality**

No two people have the exact same taste when it comes to beauty. Beauty does not belong to the intellectual side of the human mind; it is not subject to objective evaluation, nor to the rigorous logic of conceptual categorization. Beauty and art represent the uniquely individual, creative aspects of a human being. We are called upon to put our energies to the task; to use our unique talents and abilities to create beauty, and to express that beauty in our Avodat Hashem. Long ago, G-d told Moshe to command Betzalel concerning the building of the Mishkan. Betzalel was endowed with the gifts of brilliance and genius. These are special gifts of G-d and must not be permitted to go to waste, but rather must be utilized by the recipient for Avodat Hashem. Man has been given talents that should be employed to inspire not only himself but others, with beauty and warmth.

**Perfection**

Those who strive for beauty in art, aspire for a certain type of perfection. This perfection is the result of joining together smaller parts to form a whole. As the rule goes, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. When we behold noi, we are uplifted by the whole. In fine arts, for example, one can stand close to great paintings and see mere brushstrokes; only when one moves back and studies the painting from a distance can one behold the true beauty of the work. It is then that we perceive the painting as a complete entity, and can appreciate how the smaller parts contribute to the beauty of the work as a whole.

The message of noi is important for each of us. We are aware of our individual talents, and we appreciate our responsibility to utilize those gifts at every opportune moment. We must also realize that our individual actions and service are part of a greater whole. Whether that whole is the greater picture of our own personal Avodat Hashem, or the whole of the community of Knesset Yisrael, it matters not. We are dedicated to a glorious endeavor to bring G-d’s presence into this world. Although we may not always perceive the entire picture, we should never fail to sense the exhilarating joy of being part of the awesome whole.

Rabbi Azarya Berzon has over 4,800 shiurim online and has served as a Scholar-in-Residence in many communities worldwide.
A child, do you remember singing:

“Hashem gave us a present,
Do you know what it was?
He gave us the Torah and we must keep its laws.
He asked the other nations, do you want this gift of mine?
But they said no thank you, for Torah there’s no time.”

Why did G-d bother going to other nations – simply to prove Bnei Yisrael’s superiority for accepting the Torah? The song continues with pride in Bnei Yisrael’s choice:

“And then to B’nei Yisrael Hashem did go,
And we said “Na’aseh VeNishma” because we love Hashem so.”

The irritation in the text which produces this Midrashic pearl might offer a more nuanced reason why G-d first offered Torah to other nations. Our Sages crafted this Midrash from Moshe’s cryptic description of Matan Torah (the Giving of the Torah) as a prelude to his blessings for each tribe: זָרַח מִשֵּׂעִיר לָמוֹ הֹפִיעַ מֵהַר פָּארָן וְאָתָה אָמַר הַגָּד אֵלֵהֶם. Moshe continues: אַף חֹבֵב עַמִּים כָּל־ יַעֲקֹב. 

Lover of which nations? Most commentators believe Moshe’s only stop. However, perhaps the verb עָסָק describes all Am Yisrael – beloved among nations. 

G-d cherishes them despite their rejection of Torah. The verse subsequently distinguishes Bnei Yisrael for consecrating themselves and accepting Torah, even when challenging.

How humbling that we weren’t G-d’s only stop. He intended for Yishmael’s and Esav’s descendants to join us in Torah observance. The first 11 chapters of Genesis show G-d’s attempt to bring all of humanity into complete service of G-d, but humankind quicklycorrupts. G-d re-starts with Noach, but after Migdal Bavel (Tower of Babel) chooses a model nation to keep Torah’s demands. The rest of Genesis clarifies which descendants will be expected to keep all of Torah.

Indeed, Am Yisrael enjoys a special relationship with G-d, given our unflagging commitment. Moshe’s blessings for each tribe, conveying his hopes and dreams for each to actualize their potential, depend on our devotion to Torah observance.

The Midrash clarifies which descendants will be expected to keep all of Torah. The bulls offered on Sukkot reflect his hopes and dreams for each to actualize their potential, depend on our devotion to Torah observance.

The bulls offered on Sukkot reflect this theme too. Every day, the kohanim bring bulls; on the first day, 13, and then one less on each subsequent day, until they were down to seven on the last day of the holiday – 70 altogether. On Shemini Atzeret, they bring only one. Why 70, then one?

Rebi Elazar said: To what do the 70 bulls correspond? To the 70 nations. One bull [on Shemini Atzeret] corresponds to what? To the singular nation. A parable of a flesh and blood king who told his servants: Make me a grand feast. On the last day, he told his lover: make me a small meal, so I can enjoy just your [company] (Sukkah 55b).

On Sukkot, we acknowledge the relationship G-d has with all of humanity – אַף חֹבֵב עַמִּים. On Shemini Atzeret, those who submit to complete worship enjoy a special day with Him. As we conclude the Torah and prepare to restart internalizing G-d’s idealistic attempt to universally offer Torah to every nation, Vezot HaBracha reinforces that this special treatment shouldn’t generate any smugness. G-d cherishes every nation.

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1 This Midrash comes in different forms. Pirke DeRabbi Eliezer 41 is closest to the reading I suggest: it’s not out of immorality, wildness or the inability to keep to ethical rules that the other nations rejected Torah but rather because they were following family traditions. From their perspective, there may be something noble and even “halachic” in their rejection of Torah. See also Sifri 343 and Avodah Zara 2b, which may align more with the assumption that G-d used others as a foil to prove Bnei Yisrael’s superiority.

2 Rashi struggled with Bnei Yisrael being called “nations” in the plural. His solution is that Bnei Yisrael is so beloved that each tribe is called a nation.

3 Egyptian converts who came out of Egypt with the Jews.

Atara Eis is Director of the Miriam Glaubach Center and US Yoatzot Halacha Fellows Program.
Hakafot Shniyot

In Israel, it has become common to add an extra night of celebration to Simchat Torah. This is called Hakafot Shniyot. It happens on 23 Tishrei, the same night as Jews in the rest of the world celebrate Simchat Torah. This is a way for Jews around the world to show Jewish pride together. Because the holiday of Shemini Atzeret is over after one day in Israel, holiday restrictions do not apply. So Hakafot Shniyot can include things not normally allowed on Shabbat and Jewish holidays, like bands and photography.

Sukkot-Simchat Torah Crossword Puzzle

Across
2. Tree that the lulav comes from
5. Special name for the last day of Sukkot (2 words)
7. Megillah read on Sukkot
8. Done in the field at Sukkot time
10. Citron fruit shaken with the lulav
11. We begin praying for this on Shemini Atzeret

Down
1. Name of holiday immediately following Sukkot (2 words)
3. We dance with this on Simchat Torah
4. Special covering for the roof of the Sukkah
6. English for sukkah
9. Number of days Sukkot is celebrated in Israel

Tefillat HaGeshem – The Prayer for Rain

On Shemini Atzeret we say a special prayer called Tefillat HaGeshem, the prayer for rain.

We say this prayer because at this time of year in Israel, we need rain to help our crops grow and our animals stay alive. Although Jews in other parts of the world may not need rain at this time, saying Tefillat HaGeshem makes us feel closer to the Land and the people of Israel.

After saying this prayer, we once again start including מַשִּׁיב הָרוּחַ וּמוֹרִיד הַגֶּשֶׁם in the Amidah. This addition reminds us that it is only G-d “who causes the wind to blow and brings down the rain.”
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